



MISS CHEYNE
OF
ESSILMONT

AUTHOR OF
THE ROMANCE OF WAR





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MISS CHEYNE OF ESSILMONT

BY

JAMES GRANT

AUTHOR OF

“THE ROMANCE OF WAR,” “THE CAMERONIANS,”
“THE SCOTTISH CAVALIER,”
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MISS CHEYNE OF ESSILMONT.

CHAPTER I.

OUT WITH THE ROYAL BUCKHOUNDS.

‘AND your name is Alison,’ said the young man, looking tenderly in the girl’s eyes of soft grey-blue, that long, dark lashes shaded. ‘Yet I hear some of your friends call you Lisette.’

‘It is, I believe, the same thing—an old Scoto-French name, long peculiar to our family—the Cheynes of Essilmont—as papa would say if he were here,’ she added, with a soft smile. Then after a pause she asked, ‘How did you learn, Captain Goring, that it was Alison?’

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‘By looking in Debrett after I first had the pleasure’ (he had well-nigh said the joy) ‘of meeting you at the General’s garden-party in Aldershot.’

This simple avowal of an interest in her (but it might only be curiosity) caused the girl to colour a little and nervously re-adjust her reins, though her horse, pretty well blown after a long run, was now going at an easy walk, pace by pace, with the larger and stronger bay hunter of her companion, and she glanced shyly at him as he rode by her side, for Bevil Goring, in his perfect hunting costume—his coat, buckskins, and boots, his splendid strength and engaging debonair expression of face, his soldierly set up, born of infantry service in India—was all that might please a woman’s eye, however critical; and he in his turn felt that every pulse in his frame would long beat to the slight incidents of that day’s glorious scamper together on horseback.

Gathered into a tight coil under her

smart riding hat and dark blue veil, Alison Cheyne's hair was of that bright and rare tint when the brown seems to blend with or melt into amber, and these into a warmer tint still in the sunshine, and with which there is generally a pure and dazzling complexion.

'It was so kind of you, Captain Goring,' said Miss Cheyne, after a pause, 'to invite down papa to dine at your mess at Aldershot.'

'Not at all. Dalton, Jerry Wilmot, and all the other fellows were most glad to see the old gentleman. I only fear that he thought us rather a noisy lot.'

'It delighted him—we live but a dull life at Chilcote.'

'And you have had two brothers in the service, Mrs. Trelawney told me?' resumed Goring, by no means anxious to let the conversation drop, or his companion begin to think of friends who might be looking for her.

‘Yes—two, much older than I, however—poor Ranald and golden-haired Ellon.’

‘What a curious name!’

‘It is a place in Aberdeenshire where much of papa’s property once lay. Ranald died of fever, and was buried in the lonely jungle near the Jumna.’

‘Illness there does its work quickly—four and twenty hours will see the beginning and the end, and the green turf covering all. I have seen much of it in my time, Miss Cheyne—often buried the dead with my own hands, by Jove!’

‘How sad to die as my poor brother did—so far away,’ said the girl, her soft voice breaking a little. ‘We have a saying in Scotland, “May you die among your kindred.”’

‘In the service one’s comrades become one’s kindred—we are all brother soldiers.’

‘Ellon was thrown from his horse near Lahore, and impaled on his own sword, and so—and so—poor papa has now only me!’

I don't think he has ever got fairly over Ellon's death, as it left the baronetcy without an heir. But let me not think of these things.'

'I remember the unfortunate event of Ellon Cheyne's death,' exclaimed Goring, the colour gathering in his bronzed cheek. 'It occurred just close by the Cabul road, the day after we marched in from Umritsur; and, strange to say, I commanded the firing party at the poor fellow's funeral, on a day when the sky was like molten brass, and the wind swept past us hot and stifling like the blast from an open furnace.'

'You?' said Miss Cheyne, her eyes dilating as she spoke.

'Yes; my voice gave the orders for the three funeral volleys.'

'How strange—and now I meet you here!'

'The world is a small place now-a-days.'

Her eyes were full of a tender interest now, that made the heart of her companion

thrill; nor did hers do so the less that this event caused a bond of sympathy—a subject in common between them.

A sad expression stole over the features of Alison Cheyne, and so regular were these, that with the fine outline of her profile they might have been deemed insipid, but for the variable expression of her very lovely eyes and sensitive mouth; and now, when flushed with the exercise of fast riding, the excitement of following the hounds amid such a stirring concourse, and over such an open country, they seemed absolutely beautiful.

Attracted by each other's society, she and the Captain were now somewhat apart from all the field, and the brilliant hunt was waxing to its close.

The day was a bright and clear one early in October, the regular opening day of the regular season with the Royal Buckhounds. The country wore the aspect of the month; swine were rooting in the desolate cornfield, eliciting the malediction of many a hunts-

man as he tore over the black and rotting stubble; geese were coming draggled and dirty out of the muddy ponds and brooks; the hedges looked naked and cold, and the blackened bean sheaves that had never ripened were rotting in the ground. An earthy odour came from the water-flags, and every hoof-print was speedily filled with the black ooze of the saturated soil the moment it was made; but the sky was clear, if not quite cloudless, and the sunshine bright as one could wish.

The time-honoured meet had duly taken place at the old village of Salthill, the scene of that tomfoolery called the Eton Montem, till its suppression in 1848; and we need scarcely inform the reader that a certain sum is devoted annually to maintain the stables, kennels, and establishment of the Royal Buckhounds, and that with each change of Ministry the post of their master is an object of keen competition among sport-loving nobles; but the opening meet

is said to be seldom a favourite one with lovers of hard riding.

There is always a vast 'field,' and every one who 'by hook or crook' can procure a mount is there. Salthill thus becomes an animated and pleasant spectacle to the mere spectator, while it is a source of unmixed excitement to all who go to hunt—perhaps some five hundred horsemen or so, all anxious to be first in the chase, and jostling, spurring, and struggling to be so.

All know what a scene Paddington Station presents a short time previous to the meet, when the Metropolitan corps of huntsmen begin to muster in strong force, and well-known faces are seen on every hand—staunch followers of 'the Queen's'—going down by special train, the present holder of the horn being the observed of all; and the train, with a long line of dark horse-boxes starting with sixty or seventy noble horses for Slough, whence, after an eighteen miles' run, the long cavalcade of horsemen

and people on foot pours on to Salthill, huntsmen and whips bright in brilliant new costumes of scarlet laced with gold, their horses with skins like satin, and the hounds the perfection of their breed.

There may be seen young guardsmen from Windsor, cavalry men from Aldershot, which is about twenty miles distant, in spotless black and white, side by side with old fellows in tarnished pink with the old jockey-cap, horse-dealers in corduroys and perhaps blucher boots; city men, and apparently all manner of men, and here and there a lady such as only may be seen in the Row, perfect in her mount, equipment, and costume.

On the adjacent road a lady's pretty little victoria may be jammed between a crowded four in hand and a still more crowded costermonger's cart; and so the confusion goes on till some well-known deer is quietly taken away to the front; and punctually to time the master gives the order to advance,

when the huntsmen and hounds scurry into an open field, where the yeomen prickers in their Lincoln green costumes have uncartered the quarry.

Anon the line is formed, and away over the open country stream the hounds like a living tide, with red tongues out, and steam issuing from their quivering nostrils, and all follow at headlong speed.

Here it was that Alison Cheyne, Bevil Goring, and others of their party lost some of their companions in the first wild rush across a hedge with a wet ditch on the other side. Jerry Wilmot's saddle-girth gave way, and he fell in a helpless but unhurt heap on the furrows; Lord Cadbury—a peer of whom more anon—failed utterly to clear the hedge; and Tony Dalton, of Goring's regiment, though a keen sportsman, came to grief somehow in the ditch, and thus ere long Alison Cheyne had as her sole squire the companion we have described, and together, after charging with many

more a gate beyond the hedge, they had a splendid run over an open country.

Together they kept, Goring doing much in the way of guiding his fair friend, who though somewhat timid, and not much practised as an equestrienne, had now given her whole soul to the hunt, and became almost fearless for the time.

In a pretty dense clump 'the field' went powdering along the path through the village of Farnham, after which the deer headed off for Burnham Beeches, the beautiful scenery of which has been so often portrayed by artists and extolled by tourists; and then, like bright 'bits of colour' that would delight the former, the scarlet coats could be seen glancing between the gnarled stems of the giant trees, as the horsemen went pouring down the woody steps.

'Take care here, for heaven's sake, Miss Cheyne, and keep your horse well in hand, with its head up,' cried Bevil Goring.

‘The tree stumps concealed here among the long grass are most treacherous traps.’

‘I fear more the boughs of the trees, they are so apt to tear one’s hair,’ replied the flushed girl, breathlessly, as she flew, her dark blue skirt and veil streaming behind her; and now and then a cry of terror escaped her, as a horse and its rider went floundering into some marshy pool, though generally with no worse result than a mud bath.

At length the beeches are left behind, while the deer shoots on past Wilton Park, anon over Chalfont Brook, till she reaches the stable in a farmyard, and there is captured and made safe, and so ends the day, after which there is nothing left for the breathless and blown, who have followed her thus far, but to ride slowly back some fifteen miles to Slough.

Less occupied by interest in the hunt than with each other, Bevil Goring and Miss Cheyne had gradually dropped out of

it, and at the time of the conversation with which this chapter opens were riding slowly along a narrow green lane that led—they had not yet begun to consider in what precise direction.

CHAPTER II.

AT CHILCOTE.

‘THE hounds threw off at half-past eleven, and the afternoon is far advanced,’ said Miss Cheyne, with a little anxiety of manner. ‘I must take the nearest cut home.’

‘Thither, of course, I shall do myself the honour of escorting you.’

‘Thanks—so much.’

She could not say otherwise, as she could neither decline his escort nor with propriety ride home alone; yet she gave a glance rather helplessly around her, as all her immediate friends—and *one* more especially, whose escort her father wished her to have had—were now left miles behind, having

‘come to grief’ at the first fence, and were now she knew not where.

But then she thought it was not her fault that they had dropped out of the hunt, or out of their saddles perhaps.

‘To reach the high-road, we must take this fence,’ said Captain Goring, finding that the narrow lane they had pursued, ended in a species of *cul de sac*.

‘Not a gap, not a gate is in sight.’

‘And by Jove, Miss Cheyne, it is a rasper!’ he exclaimed. ‘Allow me to go first, then follow, head up and hand low.’

He measured the distance, cleared the fence, and came safely down on the hard road beyond.

With a little cry of half delight and half terror curiously mingled, the girl rushed her horse at the fence, but barely cleared it, as its hoofs touched the summit.

‘What a nasty buck jump,’ said Goring. ‘Is that an Irish horse, used to double fences, I wonder?’

‘And all my back-hair has come down.’

‘Glorious hair it is, below your waist and more.’

‘And all my own,’ said the girl laughing, as she placed her switch between her pearly teeth, and with her gauntleted hands proceeded to knot the coils deftly up; ‘all my own, by production, and not by purchase. And now for home,’ she added, as they broke into an easy trot. ‘Such a hard mouth this animal has!’ she exclaimed, after a pause; ‘my poor wrists are quite weary.’

‘Why do you ride him?’

‘I have not much choice.’

‘How?’

‘I owe my mount to the kindness of a friend of papa’s, to Lord Cadbury,’ she replied, colouring slightly, but with an air of annoyance.

‘Indeed,’ said Goring, briefly, and then after a pause, he added, ‘you have ridden with these hounds before.’

‘Yes, once when the meet was at Iver’s

Heath, and again when it was at Wokingham, and the deer was caught in a pond near Wilton Park.'

'And did Lord Cadbury on each occasion give you a mount?' he added, in a casual manner.

'Yes, we have no horses at Chilcote; but how curious you are,' she replied, colouring again, and with a sense of annoyance that he did not suspect, though the mention of the peer's name by her lips irritated Bevil Goring, and made him seek to repress the love that was growing in his heart.

Yet he knew not that he had impressed Alison Cheyne by his voice and manner beyond anyone whom she had hitherto met, but she was conscious that her heart beat quicker when he addressed her, and that the very sunshine seemed to grow brighter in his presence; but to what end was all this, she thought, unless—if he loved her—he was rich enough to suit her father's standard of wealth.

As they drew near Chilcote they tacitly, it seemed, reduced the pace of their horses to a walk.

‘If it does not grieve you now to recur to the fate of your brother Ellon,’ said Goring, in his softest tone, ‘I may mention that I have a little souvenir of him, of which I would beg your acceptance.’

‘A souvenir of Ellon!’

‘Yes.’

‘How came you to possess it?’

‘When his effects were sold at Lahore, before his regiment marched again.’

‘And this relic——’

‘Is a ring with a girl’s hair in it.’

‘Thank you so much,’ said she, with a quivering lip; ‘but to deprive you——’

‘Nay, nay, do not begin to speak thus. To whom should it belong but to you? And how strange is the chance that gives me an opportunity of presenting it!’

‘I cannot decline it; but the girl—who

can she have been? Poor Ellon, some secret is buried in his grave.'

'Soldiers' graves, I doubt not, hide many, and many a sad romance. I have generally worn it, curious to say, as my stock of jewellery is not very extensive.'

'Have you it with you now?'

'No, I never wear rings when riding, the stones are apt to get knocked out. I meant to do myself the pleasure of calling on you after the hunt; and shall, if you will permit me. To-morrow I am for guard.'

'For guard over what?'

'Nothing,' he said, laughing. 'There is nothing to see or to guard, but it is all the same to John Bull.'

'The day after, then?'

'The day after.'

They were close to the house now, and, lifting his hat, he bowed low and turned his horse just as a groom, who had been waiting in the porch, took hers by the bridle,

and, waving the handle of her switch to him in farewell, Miss Cheyne gathered up her riding skirt and entered the house.

Bevil Goring lingered at the further end of the avenue that led to Chilcote, which was in a lovely locality, especially in summer, one of those sunny places within thirty miles of St. Paul's, and one secluded and woody—a place like Burnham Beeches, where the tree trunks are of amazing size, and the path that led to the house went down a deep dell, emblossomed in a wilderness leafy at all times but in winter.

The ash, the birch, and contorted beeches overhung the slopes on each side, and there seemed an entire absence of human care about them; and there in summer the sheep wandered among the tender grass, as if they were the only owners of the domain; but Bevil Goring had but one thought as he looked around him, and then turned lingeringly away.'

'How delicious to ramble among these

leafy glades with her! How deuced glad I am that I have that poor fellow's ring, and can gratify her—perhaps myself too! Bother the guard of to-morrow; but I must get it over as best I may.'

He lighted a cigar, and at a trot took the road to Aldershot, but so sunk in thoughts that were new and delicious that he forgot all about his 'soothing weed' till it scorched his thick dark moustache.

Meanwhile let us follow Alison Cheyne into her somewhat sequestered home.

She had blushed with annoyance when resigning the reins of her horse to Gaskins, Lord Cadbury's groom, while thinking that there was neither groom nor stable at Chilcote, though, as her father had told her many a time and oft, there were stalls for four and twenty nags at Essilmont, where others stabled their horses now; and sooth to tell, for causes yet to be told, she was provoked at being under any obligation to old Lord Cadbury, especially in

the now reduced state of their fortunes.

She was received with a bright smile of welcome in the entrance hall by their sole male attendant, old Archie Auchindoir, Sir Ranald's man-of-all-work, who looked resentfully after the unconscious groom while taking away the horse, which he would gladly have retained for his young mistress by force if he could, for Archie thought regretfully of the once ample *ménage* at far away Essilmont, where, like his father before him, he had grown to manhood and age in the family of the Cheynes.

He was true as steel to his old master, to whom, however, he sometimes ventured to say sharp things in the way of advice; and to the 'pock-puddings,' as he called the denizens of the present locality, he fearlessly said sharper and very cutting things with a smirk on his mouth and a glitter in his keen grey eyes, and with perfect impunity, as they were addressed in a language to the hearers unknown; but it gratified Archie none the

less to utter them, as he often did in the guise of proverbs.

‘Papa at home?’ asked Alison.

‘Yes, Miss,’ said he, receiving her gloves and switch. ‘And waiting anxiously for you, though ower proud to show it even to me; but, my certie, it’s the life o’ an auld hat to be weel cockit.’

Their household was so small now that Alison had no maid to attend upon her, and quickly changing her costume she sought at once the presence of her father, smoothing her hair with her white hands as she hurried to receive his kiss; for, so far as he was concerned, Alison, in her twentieth year, was as much a child as when in her little frocks.

He was seated in a little room called his study, though there were few books there; but there were a writing table usually littered with letters, and invariably with an unpleasant mass of accounts to amount ‘rendered;’ an easy chair, deep, high-backed, and cosy, in which he passed most of his time,

and which was so placed that from it he had a full view of the long, woody, and neglected avenue. There he spent hours reading the *Field* and turning over books on farming, veterinary surgery, and so forth, by mere force of habit, though he had not an acre of land or a dog or a horse to look after now ; and these studies were varied by the perusal of prints of a conservative tendency, and an occasional dip into the pages of Burke.

He courteously threw into the fire the end of the cigar he had been smoking as his daughter entered, and twining her soft arm round him said, while nestling her face in his neck—

‘ Oh, papa, I have never had so delightful a day with the hounds as this !’

The master of a broken fortune and impoverished household, Sir Ranald Cheyne, baronet of Essilmont and that ilk, as he duly figured in that year’s volume of Burke and Debrett, with a pedigree going far beyond the first baronet of his house, who had

been patented in 1625, and duly infest at the Castle-gate of Edinburgh with a vast patrimony in Nova Scotia, and 'power of pit and gallows' over his vassals there, was a proud and querulous man, stately in manner and somewhat cold and selfish to all men, save his daughter Alison, who was the apple of his eye, the pride of his old heart, on whose beauty, as the means of winning another fortune, all his hopes in life were based, and with whom he was now living in semi-obscurity at Chilcote, a small, venerable, and secluded mansion in Hampshire.

Sir Ranald had a pale and worn face that in youth had been eminently handsome; his silver hair, or rather what remained of it, was brushed back behind his wax-like ears, and a smile of great tenderness for his daughter, the last of his old, old race and the hope of his age, lighted up his aristocratic features.

A gold-rimmed *pince-nez* was balanced on the thin ridge of his rather aquiline nose,

and though his bright blue eyes were smiling, as we say, their normal expression may be described as usually one of 'worry.'

His voice was in unison with his face—it was worn too, if we may use the expression, yet soft and not unmusical.

'You had an escort to the gate, I saw?' said he, interrogatively. 'Lord Cadbury, of course; why did he not come in?'

'Oh, no; I missed him in the field somewhere.'

'And your escort?'

'Was Captain Goring—you know him—from Aldershot,' she replied, a little nervously.

'Again?' said Sir Ranald, with just the slightest shade of displeasure flitting over his face. 'You were safely driven to the meet by Mrs. Trelawney?'

'Yes; and, when I last saw her and dear little Netty, their victoria was wedged between a drag and a tax-cart. I do hope they escaped without harm.'

‘I hope so, too, for she is a very charming woman. And you found Cadbury duly waiting at Salthill with his horses?’

‘Yes; and Gaskins came here to get mine.’

‘I hope you duly thanked Cadbury.’

‘Of course, papa.’

‘But why did he not make an effort to escort you home?’ asked Sir Ranald, whom this point interested.

‘I missed him in the running, as I said, papa,’ replied Alison, colouring now. ‘He is so slow at his fences.’

‘Slow; he has the reputation of generally riding faster than his horse,’ said Sir Ranald, who was unable to repress a joke at the *parvenu* peer, whom he was not without quiet hopes of having for a son-in-law. ‘Then, I suppose, Captain Goring was your escort for most of the day?’

‘Yes,’ replied Alison, frankly.

‘In fact, I may presume that you and he were always neck-and-neck; taking your

fences together, and all that sort of thing?’

‘Oh, no, papa; certainly not,’ replied Alison, thinking it was unwise to admit too much, though her father’s surmises were very near the truth.

‘I am astonished that Cadbury did not make an effort to join you.’

‘I never saw him after the hounds threw off,’ said Alison, a little wearily, as she knew how her father’s secret thoughts were tending.

‘Did you look for him?’

‘No.’

‘So—so—this is exactly what happened before.’

‘Can I help it, papa, if his wont is to fail at the first fence?’

‘You can help Captain Goring so opportunely taking his place.’

‘I do not quite see what his place is; but oh, papa, what do you think? Capt. Goring heard of poor Ellon in India—he actually laid him in his grave, if one may say so!’

‘How?’

‘He commanded the soldiers who fired over it.’

‘Indeed!’ said Sir Ranald, with some interest now.

She was about to mention the proffered ring, which she deemed a precious relic, when her father said with a tone of some gravity, and even crustily—

‘I don’t much like your following the hounds, and think you must give it up.’

‘Oh, it is delightful; and if I had a horse of my own——’

‘There you go!’ exclaimed her father, with a petty gush of irritation; ‘I don’t like it! Think how a girl looks in an October morning at a cover-side, her eyes watering, perhaps her nose red, and her cheeks blue, and after a while, perhaps, with her hat smashed, her habit torn, her hair hanging down her back, and some fellow fagging by her side drearily when he wishes her at the devil; or think of her learning to talk

of curbs and spavins, hocks, stifle, and thoroughpin, like the gentleman jockey of a dragoon corps.'

'Oh, you dear old thing!' exclaimed Alison, caressing him and laughing, though she knew that his irritation was caused only by her having permitted Bevil Goring to take the place of her elderly and titled admirer. 'I have so little amusement here at Chilcote, papa, that I did not think you would grudge me——'

'A run with the hounds on Cadbury's horses?' he interrupted, with a slight quiver, 'but I dislike the risks you run, and the chance, medley acquaintances you may meet; but pardon my petulance, darling; and now to dress for dinner, such as it is.'

Too well did Alison know that one of the acquaintances referred to was her late handsome escort; but she only said—

'I do love horses, and you remember, papa, how grieved you were when I had to relinquish, as a little girl, my dear old

Shetland pony, Pepper, and you called me your "poor bankrupt child;" and I did so miss Pepper with his barrel-shaped body, his shaggy mane, and velvet nose that he used to rub against my neck till I gave him a carrot or an apple.'

'Hence, I am the more grateful to Cadbury for so kindly putting his horses at your disposal; but for him,' added Sir Ranald, forgetting his recent remark, 'you could not have been in your proper place with the buckhounds, or shared in the pleasures of the day. Of course you wince when I mention Cadbury,' said Sir Ranald, observing a cloudy expression flit over her face.

'Well, papa, he bores me.'

'Bores you? This is scarcely grateful after all the pleasure he puts at your disposal—his horses, his box at the opera, and the bouquets, music, and so forth he so frequently sends you.'

But Alison only shrugged her shoulders, while her father retired to change his cos-

tume; for either by force of old habit, or out of respect for himself, he always assumed evening dress (faded though it was) for dinner; albeit that the latter might consist of a little better than hashed mutton or scrag of mutton *à la Russe*, in which the housekeeper, Mrs. Rebecca Prune, excelled.

‘I wish he would not talk to me so much of Lord Cadbury,’ thought Alison; ‘if his kindness is to be received in this fashion, I shall never accept a mount from him again, nor a piece of music either!’

In the few joyous hours she had spent—hours which the presence of Bevil Goring had, undoubtedly, served to brighten—Alison Cheyne had forgotten for a space the petty annoyances of her home life; its shifts and shams that often made her weary and sick at heart; her father’s pride and frequent petulance; his constant repining at the present, and futile regret over the past; his loss of position, or rather of luxury and splendour, which the loss of fortune entailed.

CHAPTER III.

ELLON'S RING.

FOR a man of acknowledged and undoubtedly good family, Sir Ranald had rather eccentric ideas of ancestry and the value thereof. He did not certainly, like the Duke d'Aremberg or Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromartie, claim kindred with the antediluvians, nor even carry his genealogy back to the dim days of Gadifer, King of Scotland, of whom it is recorded in that most veracious record *Le Grand Chronique de Bretagne*, that with Perceforest, King of Brittany, he sailed in company from the mouth of the Ganges, and was wrecked on the coast of Armorica; after which they were subsequently and severally raised to the

thrones of Britain and Caledonia by their mutual friend Alexander le Gentil, in the time of Julius Cæsar; but he could solidly trace his descent from that Ranald Cheyne of Essilmont, Cairnhill, Craig and Inverugie, who was one of the barons that signed the *Litera Communitatis Scotiæ* to Edward I. of England, about the marriage of their queen, the little Maid of Norway.

Thus he had among his ancestors men who figured greatly in the troubles and wars of the olden time, who fenced with steel the throne of Robert I., who were ambassadors to England and France for David II. and the early James's, who shed their blood at Flodden Field and Pinkie Cleugh, at Sark and Ancrum Moor, and whose swords were ever ready when their country was in peril; and so, when he thought of these things, his proud spirit was apt to chafe, and at such times especially he was inclined to view with some contempt his friend Cadbury as a mushroom, being only a peer of yesterday,

the second of his race, and for whom not even the ingenuity of the united College of Heralds could 'fudge' out a pedigree; but, for all that, the ample wealth of the latter was not without its due and solid weight in his estimation.

Like more than one old northern family, the Cheynes of Essilmont were supposed—nay, were confidently alleged—to have a mysterious warning of death or approaching woe, such as the spectre drummer whose beat at Cortachy announces when fate is nigh the 'bonnie House of Airlie,' like the bell of Coull that tolls of itself when a Dorward dies, the hairy-handed Meg Moulach of the Grants, the headless horseman of Maclean, or the solitary swan that floats on a certain lake at times fatal to another race; and so the Cheynes of Essilmont were supposed to be haunted by a spectral black hound, in the appearance of which Sir Randall strove to disbelieve in spite of himself, though its solemn baying had been heard

when Ellon died in India and his mother in London; and as for old Archy Auchindoir, the family factotum, he believed in it as he did in his own existence.

‘Original sin,’ *i.e.*, the accumulated debts of a generation or two past, with his own mad extravagance in youth, had so completely impaired Sir Ranald’s exchequer that, on a few hundreds per annum, the wreck of all his fortune, he was compelled, though not content, to live, ‘vegetate’ he deemed it, quietly in an old house in Hampshire; and times there were when in the great weariness of his heart—especially after the death of his two sons—he often thought, could he but see Alison provided for as he wished, he had no other desire than to be laid where many of his ancestors lay, a right which none could deny him, in the ancient chapel of Essilmont, where often he had with envy regarded the stiff and prostrate mailed effigies on their altar tombs, lying there with sword and shield, their faces ex-

pressive of stern serenity, and their hands folded in eternal prayer.

Chilcote, his present abode, was buried deep in woods that must have been a portion of the New Forest or the relics thereof, and had been built somewhere about the time of Queen Anne. Thus a great amount of solid oak formed a portion of its structure; and in the principal rooms the mantel-pieces ascended in carved work nearly to the ceilings, while the jambs were of massive stone, with caryatides, like the god Terminus, wreathed to the waist in leaves, supporting the entablatures.

The walls were divided into compartments by moulded panelling, painted with imaginary landscapes and ruins; the armorial bearings of the Chilcotes of other days; and beneath the surbase (or chairbelt, as it used to be called) were smaller panels, all painted with fruit and flowers.

The windows were deeply embayed, with cushioned seats. One of these was, in the

summer evenings, the favourite niche in which Alison was wont to perch herself with one of Mudie's latest novels.

The furniture was all old, faded, 'shabby,' Alison truly deemed it; but in tone it seemed much in unison with the rooms, on the walls of which her father had hung a few family pictures, the pride of his heart, gentlemen in ruffs and cloaks, dames in stomachers and capuchins, and two there were in whom he loved to trace a fancied resemblance to his dead sons, Ranald and Ellon, for they were brothers, and bore the same names—Ranald Cheyne, who fell at the head of the Scots Life Guards at Worcester, and Ellon Cheyne, who had died previously at the storming of Newcastle; both men portrayed in the gorgeous costume of their time, and both looked to the life, 'blue-blooded Scottish cavaliers, pale, smooth-skinned, with moustache and love lock, haughty and 'imperious,' and each with an expression of face that seemed to say they

would have thought as little of spitting a crop-eared roundhead as a lark, with their long Toledoes.

On the day after the hunt Lord Cadbury's groom, Gaskins, came riding to Chilcote with a magnificent bouquet from the conservatories for Alison, and his master's anxious inquiries as to how she had enjoyed the sport of the previous day, and a hope that she had not suffered from fatigue; and Alison, as she buried her pretty pink nostrils among the cool and fragrant roses, smiled covertly and mischievously as she heard from Gaskins how his master had 'got such a precious spill by funking at a bull-finch, when the hounds were thrown off, that he would be confined to the house for some days.'

Thus for a time she would be free from the annoyance of his presence.

Archie, the white-haired man-of-all-work, gave Mr. Gaskins a tankard of beer after he had leaped into his saddle, where he took what Archie called a 'standing drink, like

the coo o' Forfar.' Lord Cadbury's powdered servants, in elaborate liveries, were always a source of supreme contempt (mingled, perhaps, with envy) to Sir Ranald's staunch henchman, and now he felt inclined to sneer if he could at the well-appointed groom, in his dark grey surtout, waistbelt, cockade, and top-boots.

'Braw leathers, thae o' yours,' said he, regarding the latter with some interest.

'Yaas,' drawled Gaskins. 'I flatter myself that few gents appear with better boot tops than Cadbury and myself. I clean them with a preparation—quite a conserve, Mr. Hackendore, peculiarly my own.'

'And what may that be?' asked Archie.

'Champagne and apricot jam,' replied Gaskins, twirling his moustache and eyeing the old man with intense superciliousness.

'Set ye up, indeed, wi' your buits and belts!' snapped Archie. 'Ye think yoursel' made for the siller; but a bawbee cat may look at a king.'

'I don't understand the sense of your remark,' drawled Gaskins, shortening his reins.

'Like enough—like enough; mony complain o' want o' siller, but few complain o' want o' sense; and a gowk at Yule will ne'er be bricht at Beltane.'

'What the devil is he talking about?' thought the bewildered groom, as he put spurs to his horse and trotted away.

'Wi' a' his bravery,' said Archie, with a grimace, 'he's a loon that will loup the dyke where it's laigest.'

Alison divided the bouquet into portions for various vases to ornament her drawing-room, and on the following day, after a more than usually careful toilette, while her father was occupied in worry and perplexity over letters and accounts, seated herself in the deep bay of a window that overlooked the avenue, her heart beating quicker as the noon wore on.

She had a novel in her hand, but we

doubt if she knew even the title of it. Pleasure, doubt, and anxiety were mingling in the girl's mind—pleasure, as she thought, 'I shall see him again for a time, however brief!'—doubt of what might ensue if she saw him under the keen watchful eyes of her father, who could detect every expression of her face, and a great anxiety lest she might be requested to avoid all intimacy, even acquaintanceship, with Bevil Goring in future; but little could she foresee the turn matters were to take, or the events of the next few days.

Luncheon was long past, and the afternoon was drawing on, when Goring rode down the avenue and gave the bridle of his horse to Archie Auchindoir, who, with a considerable appearance of being flustered, had—on the approach of a visitor—hurried from the garden, where he had been at work, to don an old black claw-hammer coat, the reversion of Sir Ranald's wardrobe.

He ran the bridle rein deftly through an

iron ring in the ivy-covered porch, and preceded the young officer, whose card he placed on a silver tray with as much formality as if the little mansion of Chilcote had been a residence like Buckingham Palace.

Sir Ranald bade him welcome with finished courtesy and old-fashioned grace, while Alison, her cheek mantling with ill-concealed pleasure—for what young girl but feels her pulses quicken in the presence of a handsome and welcome admirer—continued to keep her back to the windows; thus, during the usual exchange of commonplaces and inquiries, Sir Ranald, who watched both, failed to detect anything in the manner of either that could lead to the inference that they had more interest in each other than ordinary acquaintances, and began to feel rather grateful to the young officer who had come to do them a kindness.

‘So glad to see you again, Captain Goring, and to thank you for your care of Miss

Cheyne when with the hounds,' he said, motioning their visitor to a seat. 'The cavalier to whom I entrusted her, Lord Cadbury, seems to have come to grief at his first fence,' added the old gentleman, laughing over the mishap of his friend, to whom Goring would rather that no reference had been made.

'I promised to call, Sir Ranald, and inquire for Miss Cheyne, after our pretty rough run, especially by Burnham Beeches, where the pack hunted their game pretty hard,' said Goring, 'and also to beg her acceptance of a relic of your son Ellon, of the Hussars, of which I became possessed by the merest chance in India.'

'A thousand thanks. Most kind of you, Captain Goring,' said Sir Ranald, his usually pale cheek reddening for a moment.

'I learned incidentally from Miss Cheyne, as we rode towards Chilcote, that the poor lad who was killed at Lahore was her younger brother, and that the ring I possess

had been his. It is here,' he added, opening a tiny morocco box, in which he had placed the ring.

It was a richly chased trinket, having two clam-shells of gold, with a diamond in the centre of each.

'Ellon's ring it is, indeed,' exclaimed Sir Ranald, in a changed voice, while the moisture clouded the glasses of his *pince-nez*.

'My farewell gift to him on the morning he marched from Maidstone—you remember, papa,' exclaimed Alison, with tears in her voice.

'I am not likely to forget, God help me, that both my boys are gone, and now I have——'

'Only me, papa.'

'It is a source of supreme satisfaction that I am the means of restoring this to his family,' Goring added, judiciously, as he was on the point of saying 'sister,' and he placed it in her hand; but that hand seemed so slim and white and beautiful that he was tempted

to do more, for he slipped the ring rather playfully and rather nervously on one of her fingers, saying, 'It is a world too wide.'

'Of course,' said Sir Ranald, 'it is a man's ring.'

'But, see!' exclaimed Alison, as she pressed a spring, of the existence of which Goring had been until that moment ignorant, and the two clamshells unclosing showed a minutely and beautifully coloured little photo, no larger than a shilling, of her own charming face.

'Good heavens!' said Goring, with genuine surprise and pleasure, 'I was all unaware of this secret, though I have worn the ring for two years and more.'

'And all that time you have been wearing *my* ring, *my* hair, *my* likeness,' muttered Alison, in a low voice, while Sir Ranald was ringing the bell.

'Delicious fatality,' thought Goring, as he looked on the sweet flushed face that was upturned to his, and their eyes met in a

mutual glance that expressed more than their lips dared tell already, and which neither ever forgot. Luckily at that moment the baronet, on hospitable thoughts intent, was ordering Archie to bring wine, mentioning a rare brand from the small store which yet remained of the wreck of better days—a store kept for visitors alone.

‘My brothers died within a month of each other in India, Captain Goring,’ said Alison. ‘Poor mamma never got over the double shock, and—and—we have never been at Essilmont since.’

‘Could not your presence, your existence, console her?’ asked Goring.

‘No; her soul was centred in her boys.’

‘I shall never forget your kindness, Captain Goring, in bringing us this little relic of Ellon,’ said Sir Ranald; ‘and now after your ride from the camp try a glass of this white *Clos Vougeot*. But perhaps you would prefer red. We have both, I think, Archie?’

Though the last bottle of the red sparkling Burgundy had long since vanished, Archie vowed there was a binful, and fortunately for his veracity Goring announced a decided preference for the white; and while Alison played dreamily with her brother's ring, and thought again and again how strange it was that her hair and her likeness should have been worn with it for so long in far and distant lands by Bevil Goring, the conversation turned to general subjects between the latter and her father, who came secretly to the conclusion that he 'was a very fine young fellow.'

He had seen the last on earth of Ellon, had stood by his grave, had seen the smoke of the death volleys curling over it, and seen it covered up; thus Alison thought he was more to her than any mere stranger could ever be, and already, in her heart, she had begun to deem him more indeed.

And after he had taken his departure, when she offered the ring to Sir Ranald, to

her joy, he begged her to retain it, and, much to her surprise, answered that he meant to have a little dinner party.

'You quite take my heart away, papa—a dinner party!' exclaimed Alison.

'Yes, we shall have this young fellow Goring (he asked me to dine at his mess, you know), and his brother officers Dalton and Wilmot, Cadbury of course, and you can have Mrs. Trelawney, who is always charming company, to keep you in countenance—a nice little party.'

'Oh, papa,' exclaimed Alison, in genuine dismay, 'think of our poor *ménage*.'

'Tut—consult Mrs. Prune on the subject.'

'I thought you wished to have a rest from dinner parties.'

'I have been at so many, that some return——'

'Yes—but—but, papa——'

'What next, child?'

'Our last quarter's bills were so large,' urged Alison.

‘Large for our exchequer, I have no doubt.’

‘Let us call it luncheon, papa, and I think I shall arrange it nicely,’ she pleaded, her heart quickening at the chance of meeting Bevil (she already thought of him as ‘Bevil’) again. So that was decided on, and the invitation notes were quickly despatched.

Alison had watched from a window the shadow of their visitor, as that of man and horse lengthened out on the sunlighted road, until shadow and form passed away; but Goring, as he rode homeward, was little aware that he had not seen the *last* of Ellon Cheyne’s ring.

CHAPTER IV.

LAURA TRELAWNEY.

THE invited guests all responded, and accepted almost by return of post, and a sigh of relief escaped Sir Ranald when he found no missives came with them, as he was generally well pleased when he saw the village postman pass the avenue gate.

‘Captain Goring, I see, uses sealing wax—good custom—good old style,’ said he, returning that officer’s note to Alison, who prized it rather more than he knew; ‘uses a shield too—the chevron and annulets of the Gorings of Sussex—not a crest; every trumpery fellow sticks one on his notepaper now—the crest that never shone on a helmet.’

So, from this circumstance, Bevil Goring

rose in the estimation of the baronet, who knew all Burke's Armory by rote.

The luncheon lay heavy on poor Alison's heart; she thought of their *cuisine*, as it too often was—refined and dainty though her father's tastes were—meat roasted dubiously, then made up into stews and lumpy minces, with rice puddings, and she shivered with dismay, and had long and deep consultations with old Mrs. Rebecca Prune and her daughter Daisy; but when the day came her fears were ended, and she began 'to see her way,' as she said, and contemplated the table with some complacency.

In her blue morning robe, trimmed with white, which suited so well her complexion and the character of her beauty, she was cutting and placing in crystal vases the monthly roses and few meagre flowers with fern leaves from her tiny conservatory at the sunny end of the house to decorate the table.

'Don't they look pretty, papa?' she exclaimed, almost gleefully.

‘Yes, but you, pet Alison, are the sweetest flower of them all,’ said Sir Ranald, kissing the close white division of her rich brown hair.

‘“Dawted dochters mak’ daidling wives,” they say,’ muttered old Archie, who was busy polishing a salver; ‘but our dear doo, Miss Alison, will never be ane o’ them, Sir Ranald.’

For the honour of the house, Archie had been most anxious to furnish his quota to the feast, and said—

‘Miss Alison, I am sure I would catch ye some troots in the burn owre by, though the weeds ha’e grown sae in the water, if you would like them.’

‘Thanks, Archie, you old dear,’ replied Alison, laughing, ‘but we won’t require them.’

The cold salmon and fowls, the salads, some game, the grapes, and other etceteras of a well-appointed repast, to which delicate cutlets were to be added, with some of Sir

Ranald's irreproachable wines—almost the last remnants of a once well-stocked cellar—made the table complete, and Alison content; nor must we forget the dainty china and crested silver dishes, heirlooms for generations back, which were brought from their repositories, and were the pride of old Auchindoir's heart and of his master's too.

The chief of these was a relic of considerable antiquity, being nothing less than a maizer, or goblet of silver, bequeathed by Elizabeth, Queen Consort of Scotland, to her master of the household, the Laird of Essilmont, who, with Douglas, pursued Edward of England from Bannockburn to the gates of Dunbar, and which had emblazoned (in faded colours) and graven on it the Cheyne arms, chequy *or* and *azure*, a fess gules, fretty of the first, and crested with a buck's head, erased.

Mrs. Trelawney and her little daughter were the first to arrive. She swept up to Alison, kissed her on both cheeks, with more

genuine affection than effusiveness, and apologised for the presence of her little companion.

‘I knew you would pardon me bringing the poor child. She has no one to love but me, and mopes so much when left alone.’

‘Netty, I hope, loves me too,’ exclaimed Alison, taking the girl—a bright little thing of some eight years or so, with a shower of clustering curls—in her arms and kissing her fondly. ‘I don’t think papa would consider his little entertainment complete without Netty to prattle to him.’

Mrs. Trelawney, a brilliant blonde of seven and twenty, though a widow, looked almost girlish for her years; her figure was tall and eminently handsome; her white-lidded and long-lashed hazel eyes were full of brilliant expression; her manner was vivacious, and every action of her hands and head graceful in the extreme. She formed an attractive and leading feature in every

circle, and usually was the centre of a group of gentlemen everywhere, and yet, singular to say, she rather avoided than courted both notice and society.

When she talked she seemed the art of pleasing personified; her words, her gestures, her bright eyes, and beautiful lips were all prepossessing.

She would invest petty trifles with interest; her accents were those of grace, and she could polish the point of an epigram, or say even a bold thing, better certainly than any other woman Alison had ever met. Her vivacity was said to approach folly; but even in her moments of folly, she was always interesting.

On the other hand she had times of depression almost amounting to gloom, most singular even to those who knew her best, and it was averred that, though not very rich, she had refused many eligible offers, and preferred the perfect freedom of widowhood.

‘And now, dear,’ she said, as she took an

accustomed seat in the drawing-room, 'tell me all who are coming.'

'Well, there is Lord Cadbury.'

'Of course.'

'And Captain Goring.'

'Of course,' said the pretty widow, fanning herself, though a crystal screen was between her and the fire.

'Why of course?' asked Alison, colouring; 'and there is Jerry Wilmot—your devoted—and Captain Dalton, who will be sure to fall in love with you.'

At Dalton's name Mrs. Trelawney changed colour; indeed she grew so perceptibly pale, while her lips quivered, that Alison remarked it.

'Dearest, what agitates you so? Do you know him?' asked the girl.

'No—not at all!'

'What then——'

'I knew one of the same name who did me—let me rather say—my family—a great wrong.'

‘But he cannot be the same person.’

‘Oh, no. Besides, this Captain Dalton has just come from India with his regiment. And so you think he will be sure to fall in love with me?’ added Mrs. Trelawney, recovering her colour and her smiles; ‘and I with him perhaps.’

‘That does not follow; but he seems just the kind of man I think a widow might fall in love with—handsome and manly, grave, earnest, and sympathetic.’

‘But he may share in the aversion of Mr. Weller, senior, and have his tendency to beware of widows. I feel certain, Alison dear, that your Captain Dalton will never suit me.’

‘You have seen him, then?’

‘Yes—with the buckhounds the other day.’

‘Wilmot, who admires you so much, will one day be very rich, they say.’

‘Don’t talk thus, Alison, or I shall begin to deem you what I know you are not—

mercenary; but Jerry Wilmot has little just now; he has, however, a knowledge of horseflesh and a great capability for spending money, and thinks a pack of hounds in a hunting country is necessary to existence. He is a detrimental of the first water, and the special *bête-noire* of Belgravian and Tyburnian mammas.'

'It is a pity you should ever seclude yourself as you sometimes do, Laura,' said Alison, looking at her beautiful friend with genuine admiration; 'all men admire you so much, and you have but to hold up your little finger to make them kneel at your feet.'

'How you flatter me! But I never will hold up my little finger, nor would I marry again for the mines of Potosi and Peru. It is as well that little Netty is so busy with that photographic album, or she might marvel at your anxiety to provide her with a papa.'

'It is not wealth you wait for?'

'No.'

‘What then, Laura?’

‘Nothing.’

‘How I shall laugh if the handsome Captain Dalton stirs that now unimpressionable heart of yours.’

‘I shall be very glad to meet him,’ said Mrs. Trelawney, with a curious hardness in her voice.

‘Why?’

‘Because I may compel him to love me, Alison,’ and as Mrs. Trelawney spoke her eyes flashed with a triumphant glow such as Alison had never seen in them before.

‘Compel him?’

‘Yes.’

‘It would be easy to make him love you; but would you marry him?’

‘How your little head runs on love and marriage! No, Alison, I shall never marry—*again!*’

‘Poor soul,’ thought Alison, admiringly, ‘how much she must have loved her first husband!’

And simultaneously with the entrance of Sir Ranald, the three brother officers—Bevil Goring, Jerry Wilmot, and Captain Dalton—were announced, and all these were men of the best style, in accurate morning costume, all more than usually good-looking, set up by drill, easy in bearing, and looking ruddy with their ride from the camp in a chill October day.

‘I missed you early in the hunt, Miss Cheyne,’ said Jerry, after the introductions were over. ‘How you and Goring flew over that first fence!’

‘I love to gallop over everything,’ replied Alison, ‘but I must confess that my sympathies in the field are always with the flying stag, or the poor little panting hare—a miserable, tiny creature, with a horde of men, horses, and dogs after it, and making the welkin ring when in at the death!’

‘Yes, though by the way I never know precisely what the said welkin is, unless it be the regions of the air.’

All unaware that his name had been so recently and so curiously on her lovely lips, Captain, or Tony Dalton, as his comrades called him, was saying some commonplaces to Mrs. Trelawney, over whose chair he was stooping.

He was not much her senior perhaps in years, but he had seen much of service in India. Tall and dark, with closely-shorn brown hair, he had an air and face that were commanding; but with a simple grace of bearing that belied any appearance of self-assertion.

After India, where he had been long on a station up country; where all the Europeans were males, and not a lady within three hundred miles; where a wet towel and half a water-melon formed the morning head-dress, and visits of the water-carrier incessant; where books were scarce, serials scarcer, flies and heat plentiful; and where the little tawny women, with their nose-rings and orange-coloured cheeks, were all

alike hideous, to see such a woman as Mrs. Trelawny, with her snowy skin, her shell-like ears, and marvellous hands, was something indeed.

She was dressed in rich dark silk—not mourning; she wore no widow's cap, but had her fine hair simply braided in a heavy and beautiful coil at the back of her handsome head, and she looked as fair and lovely as she must have done on her marriage morning.

Bevil Goring had begun to address Alison, whose sweet eyes were shyly upturned to his as she placed in the bosom of her dress a rosebud he had taken from the lapel of his coat, when the deep Doric voice of Archie Auchindoir was heard announcing the *bête-noire* of both.

‘Lord Cawdbury.’

CHAPTER V.

ALISON'S LUNCHEON PARTY.

A MAN, between fifty and sixty years of age, having a short, paunchy, and ungainly figure, grizzled hair, ferret-like eyes with a cunning unscrupulous expression, and a long heavy moustache which was almost white, entered with a smiling face and an easy and well-assured air that was born, not of innate good breeding, but of the supreme confidence given by position and a well-stocked purse.

Coarse and large hands and ears, with an over-display of jewellery, especially two or three gold-digger-like rings, showed that, though the second peer of his family, Lord

Cadbury was of very humble origin indeed.

His face wore its brightest smile as he greeted his hostess, Alison, and under his white moustache showed the remainder of a set of teeth that, as Jerry Wilmot said afterwards, were like the remnants of the old Guard, 'few in number and very much the worse for wear.'

He shook the slender hand of Sir Ranald with considerable cordiality, yet not without an air of patronage, bowed over Mrs. Trelawney's gloved fingers, nodded slightly to the three officers (Cadbury did not like military men), and, seating himself by Alison's side, banteringly accused her of running away at Salthill and leaving him behind (he did not say in the ditch), which was precisely what she did do; nor did she attempt to excuse herself, but simply rose and took his arm when Archie announced the luncheon was ready, and, the moment he seated himself, the peer began to expatiate upon the improvements he was making at

Cadbury Court, for behoof of the table generally, though his remarks were made especially to her; but she heard with indifference a description of the vineries, pineries, and so forth, which he was erecting at a vast cost.

Not so her father, who, with the *pince-nez* balanced on his aristocratic nose, heard of these things with a face which wore a curiously mingled expression of satisfaction and contempt; for he failed not to recognize a tone of vulgar ostentation that seemed so well to suit, he thought, 'the tradesman's coronet of yesterday,' and endeavoured to turn the conversation to hunting, though his days for it were passed.

'The world changes, and has changed in many things, Captain Dalton,' said he; 'but true to his old instincts man will always be a huntsman and a soldier.'

'But to uncart a tame deer, or let a hare out of a bag, and then pursue it with horse and dog as if one's life depended upon the

recapture, scarcely seems a sane proceeding,' said Lord Cadbury, who still felt the effects of his 'spill' in the field, 'and all unsuited to this age of refinement.'

'I believe only in the refinement that is produced by the education of generations,' said Sir Ranald, a little irrelevantly, as he tugged his white moustache and felt himself unable to repress a covert sneer at the very man for whom he had destined Alison, with whom the peer was too much occupied to hear what was said.

With all her regard and esteem for old Archie Auchindoir, Alison was rather bored by the bewilderment of Goring and others, on whom he was in attendance, at his quaintness, oddity, and unintelligible dialect; and sooth to say, all undeterred by rank and wealth, he was very inattentive and curt to Lord Cadbury, of whose views he was no more ignorant than most servants usually are of their superior's affairs.

Thus many a grimace stole over his wrin-

kled and saturnine visage as he watched the pair, and muttered, as he carved game at the sideboard—

‘It is a braw thing to be lo’ed, nae doubt, but wha wad mool wi’ an auld moudiewart like that? No our Miss Alison, certes.’

On the strength of his wealth and rank, of many a pretty present forced upon her unwillingly, yet with her father’s consent, and curiously enough upon his great seniority to her in years, which enabled him ‘to do the paternal,’ as Mrs. Trelawney once said, Lord Cadbury assumed a kind of right of proprietary in Alison Cheyne that was very galling to the latter before her guests, and under the sense of which Bevil Goring chafed in secret as he drank his wine in silence and gnawed his moustache in sheer anger, for Alison was fast becoming to him more than he might ever dare acknowledge to herself.

‘You must have married when very young, Mrs. Trelawney,’ said Dalton, who

was plying her daughter with grapes and crystallised fruits.

‘Yes—I was just seventeen.’

‘It is so romantic to marry young.’

‘Too romantic perhaps to be either a sensible or a practical proceeding,’ said Mrs. Trelawney, her slender fingers contrasting in their whiteness with the deep crimson of her claret glass; ‘but there is only one thing else better than marrying young.’

‘And that is——’

‘To die young, Captain Dalton!’ she said, laughingly, yet with a curious flash in her soft hazel eyes.

‘Like those whom the gods love?’

‘Yes.’

Dalton knew not what to make of these strange speeches, but after a time he began to see that she was rather given to indulging in wild and even bitter ones, yet all said laughingly; and he rapidly began to regard her as a species of beautiful enigma.

To Alison it became apparent that a sud-

den change had come over her friend Laura at the first sight of Captain Dalton ; she had grown pale and silent, and even *distrain*—so much so that Alison had whispered to her,

‘ Does he remind you of anyone ?’

‘ Yes,’ she had replied.

‘ Of whom ?’

‘ Pardon me.’

‘ She is thinking of her dead husband, no doubt. Dear me, if this should prove a case !’ thought the little match-maker, who saw that as the luncheon proceeded Mrs. Trelawney was all gaiety, smiles, and brilliance, and too evidently leaving nothing undone by sallies of wit to fascinate Dalton ; and Alison felt grateful to her that by her gaiety she had made the little luncheon quite a success, as she felt it to have been when all returned to the drawing-room to have some music.

‘ Now, Laura dear,’ said she, ‘ we all look to you first,’ and Dalton led the widow to

the piano, and she began to play readily with great brilliancy, force, and execution some very rare and difficult pieces of music, while he stood by and turned over the leaves; and when pressed to sing she began at once a little ballad the words of which were curious, and went to a singularly slow, sad, and wailing air:—

‘Think not of me in summer’s blush,
When flowers around thee spring,
And warbling birds on every bush
Their sweetest music sing.
Think not of me, when winter stern,
His icy throne uprears,
And long lost friends with joy return,
To tell of other years.

‘But when the sighing breezes own
Sad autumn’s blighting sway,
And withered flowers and leaves are strewn,
In silence o’er thy way;
Then think of me! for withered lies
The dearest hope I nursed;
And I have seen, with bitter sighs,
My brightest dream dispersed.’

Other verses—of which these are a sample—followed, and her voice, tender, plaintive,

half passionate, and somewhat piteous, gave a powerful effect to the words, to which Tony Dalton seemed to listen like a man in a dream as he hung over her.

‘Oh, Laura,’ exclaimed Alison, hurrying to her side, with a merry little laugh, ‘that melodramatic ditty is most unlike you. Where, in the name of goodness, did you pick it up?’

‘I have heard that song long, long ago, Mrs. Trelawney,’ said Captain Dalton, trying to pull himself together.

‘When?’ asked the singer, turning her eyes upon him with one of their most effective glances under lashes long and dark.

‘I cannot say,’ replied the officer; ‘but I have heard these verses sung by a voice so like yours that I am bewildered.’

‘Was it in a dream?’ she asked, softly.

‘Perhaps.’

‘I found them in an old album, in which they were written by a friend years ago.’

‘What friend?’ asked Dalton, almost mechanically.

‘That matters little now, nor could it interest you.’

‘It does—it does, because I knew that song well years ago, as you say.’

Her eyelashes quivered, even her hands trembled with some real or perhaps pretended emotion, and she cut short the subject by dashing at once into a piece of Verdi's music, and by her brilliancy and sparkle she seemed to be absorbing Dalton entirely now, greatly to the dismay of Jerry, who was one of her bondsmen.

Mrs. Trelawney, who had undoubtedly been studying the former, saw that he was in many ways an interesting man, whose face and bearing indicated that he had seen much of the world, much of human life, and done all that a soldier might do in it—that there was at times something of restlessness and impatience in his eyes and on his lips, as of a man who had a secret, the

clue to which she was curious to find.

When Alison took her place at the piano, where Goring posted himself on duty to turn the leaves (old Lord Cadbury knew not a note of music luckily), Mrs. Trelawney drew her daughter towards her, and said—

‘This is my little girl, Captain Dalton. Give your hand, child.’

The latter, a very little girl, indeed—quite a small lady—gave her tiny hand to Dalton, who looked into her shy eyes earnestly, and then said, with a bright smile—

‘How singular that she is not like you!’

‘No—she is dark-complexioned.’

‘And you are almost blonde, though your eyes are hazel. I presume she resembles her father?’

‘She does in many points—in others I hope she never will,’ added Mrs. Trelawney, in her heart.

‘Is it long since she lost him?’ asked Dalton, softly.

‘She never knew him.’

‘How?’

‘Fate took him from me before she was born.’

‘Poor child!’ said Dalton, caressing the girl’s soft and silky hair, while her tiny fingers toyed with a ring he wore; ‘she is quite a little beauty, but she could not fail to be so.’

‘You are pleased to be complimentary, Captain Dalton,’ said Mrs. Trelawney, who seemed more pleased with his admiration of the child than of herself, and a little sigh escaped her.

There was now, as when she sang, a great tenderness in her voice, a kind of plaintive ring in it that stirred Dalton’s heart curiously, and when she asked him question upon question, with a considerable depth of interest, as to the places he had seen, the adventures that had befallen him, the battles in which he had shared, and so forth, he found himself gradually unfolding

to her all his past interests, his present plans, his future hopes—if, indeed, he had any; while she listened with her inquiring eyes, half veiled by their drooping lids, fixed on his, her bosom heaving, and a white hand swaying her feather fan mechanically to and fro.

‘And now tell me, Captain Dalton,’ said she suddenly, as he paused; ‘but you will think me very curious—in all these years of military wandering, how you never thought of marriage?’

‘A strange question!’ said he.

‘And a leading one, you may think,’ she resumed, laughing merrily; ‘but we widows are privileged people—well?’

‘Never!’ said he, in a low, husky voice, and, through the bronze the Indian sun had cast upon his cheek, she could see the scarlet blush that mantled there, and, rather shrinking from the turn their conversation had taken, he drew back, and his place was instantly assumed by Jerry Wilmot, who

plunged at once into a conversation, which he conducted in a low and confidential tone, while playing with her fan, of which he had possessed himself.

Jerry Wilmot was eminently a handsome fellow. From his well set-up soldierly head to his slender well-moulded feet no fault could be found with him; but though his manner and conversation were full of that subtle flattery and earnestness which, if it does not make its way to a woman's heart, at least appeals to her vanity, he made no progress apparently with Mrs. Trelawney, who on this occasion listened to him with less patience than usual, and without even her generally amused smile.

'Are all men precisely alike to you?' whispered Jerry.

'In the main they are.'

'This evening too?'

'Yes—decidedly so,' she replied, with a side glance. 'Now please give me my fan, Jerry, and don't break it, as you so often do.'

CHAPTER VI.

‘THE OLD, OLD STORY.’

ON this afternoon Alison felt, with pleasant confidence, that she was ‘looking her best,’ dressed to perfection, and had been equal to the occasion. She wore a closely-fitting costume of lustreless black silk, edged everywhere with rare old white lace that had been her mother’s; her hair appeared more golden than brown in the sunshine, while seeming to retain the latter in its silky coils.

Round her slender neck was a collarette of soft, filmy white lace, and in it was a Provence rose, which Lord Cadbury had not been slow to detect as one from his own bouquet, and gathered some hope there-

from, as Bevil Goring did from her wearing his rosebud.

As she stood in the deep bay of one of the old windows, with the full flood of the ruddy afternoon sun streaming upon her, she made a charming picture, and there Goring joined her, while the rest were all engaged in general conversation. He was already feeling that to be near her was happiness, and that to see her, even across a table, was a thousand degrees better than not seeing her at all.

And she—brief though their acquaintance was—had become conscious of a quicker beating of her pulse, an undefinable sense of pleasure pervading her whole form, a mantling of colour in her cheek when he approached or spoke to her. Little had as yet passed between them; but the tell-tale eyes had told much.

‘What a wonderful vista of old beech-trees!’ said Goring, referring to the view from the windows.

‘And the distant village spire closes it so prettily,’ she replied; ‘but you cannot see it properly from this point—but from that little terrace.’

‘May we step out?’

‘Oh, yes.’

She tried to open the window, a French one, which opened to the floor within and to a couple of stone steps without.

‘Allow me,’ murmured Goring, and as he drew back the latch his fingers closed for a moment over hers.

They were only friends—he was only a visitor—why should she not show him the view, or anything else that interested him? She took a Shetland shawl from a chair close by, threw it over her head, and, gathering the soft folds under her pretty chin in a hand that was white as a rosebud, passed out with him upon the little terrace that overlooked her garden.

‘And so that is Chilcote Church?’

‘Yes, Captain Goring—an old edifice—

old, they say, as the time of Edward the Elder. It is covered with ivy, and is a capital subject to sketch.'

'And is this building here, with the eaves, your stable?'

'Oh, no—we have no stables; but it is the scene of my peculiar care,' replied Alison, laughing.

'Indeed!'

'My hen-house.'

And, with all his growing admiration of her, the fashionable young officer almost laughed when his charming companion showed him her hen-houses—her beautiful Hamburgs, Dorkings, and their chutches of Cochin-China chickens.

'Do you like bees?' she asked.

'No—they sting, you know; but I don't object to the honey.'

So she showed him her hives, as if Goring had never seen such things before; and so on by the duck-pond, and round the old-fashioned house, with its heavy eaves, dor-

mer windows, and masses of ivy, and he could only think what a picturesque background it made to the central figure of his lovely companion, who, sooth to say, in the pleasure of his society, forgot all about her other guests; or, if she did think, she knew that Mrs. Trelawney could amuse them all.

To Bevil Goring Alison was quite unlike any other girl he had met, she seemed so highly bred, and yet withal so natural. There seemed to be an originality about her that piqued his fancy, while her freshness of heart was charming; and she often showed a depth of thought and consideration—born perhaps of her family troubles and surroundings—that surprised and interested him. More than all did her grace and beauty bewilder him; and after this, amid the routine of duty at Aldershot, and during many a dusty day of drill in the Long Valley, he could only think of her image, her soft laughter, and the sweet, varying expression of her grey-blue eyes.

‘With what pathos Mrs. Trelawney sang!’ said Goring, as after their little promenade they drew near the French window again.

‘Yes; one might have thought she was singing that queer song of herself. There seemed somehow a kind of wail in it, as if it came from the heart. But we must go in now.’

‘One moment yet,’ said he, pausing and almost touching her hand; ‘I am so happy to be alone with you that I grudge every opportunity you give to others.’

‘It is very good of you to say so,’ replied Alison to this rather confused remark, as their eyes met with a mutual glance neither could mistake nor ever forget; ‘but the evening has become very chilly.’

And with this commonplace remark, while her heart was beating wildly with new, delicious, and hitherto unknown emotions that made her cheek glow and then grow very pale, Alison entered the room as

Bevil Goring opened and reclosed the French window.

From that moment she knew that Bevil loved her; his eyes had told her so, and young as she was, Alison was able to read his confession in them.

Now Sir Ranald had missed the pair from the drawing-room during the few minutes they had been absent, and drew his own conclusions therefrom, but not so Lord Cadbury, who had as yet no jealousy; nor could he dream that any commoner or poorer person could enter into a competition with him for anything, assured as he was, in an absurd degree, of the overwhelming influence of his own rank and his own money, which hitherto had always procured him whatever he had a fancy for.

When Mrs. Trelawney's carriage was announced by Archie, and that lady was being shawled previous to her departure, she made Alison grow pale with annoyance by whispering as she kissed her—

‘I hope, darling, you have not been making a fool of yourself?’

‘How?’

‘Young as you are, you are certainly old enough to know what officers are!’

‘I do not understand you, Laura—what are they?’

‘The greatest flirts in the world.’

‘Have you found them so?’

‘I have had more experience of them than I ever care to have again,’ said she, bitterly. ‘Good-bye, Captain Dalton,’ she exclaimed, presenting her hand to the tall, dark officer who had been regarding her attentively.

‘Rather let us say *au revoir*,’ said he bowing. ‘I have with me at the camp a necklace of Champac beads which I brought from India, and I have just promised them to your daughter; if you will permit me to send—or to call——’

‘We shall be so happy to see you—but you are too kind, and are you not depriv-

ing some other little, or fairer friend——’

‘No, Mrs. Trelawney; I have scarcely a lady friend in the world now,’ said he, laughing, though his speech seemed a grave one.

A few minutes after and the little party had separated; Lord Cadbury remained behind, to the intense annoyance of Goring, who, with his two companions, went back to the camp at a canter to be in time for mess; and while Sir Ranald—Cadbury’s senior by some fifteen years—dozed and slept after dinner in his easy chair, Alison, till she was weary and well-nigh desperate, had to undergo the prolonged visit, the society, and the unconcealed tenderness, or would-be love-making, of her odious old admirer.

When Alison retired that night, Bevil’s rosebud was carefully placed in a flower glass upon her toilette table, while Cadbury’s Provence rose was left to repose in the coal-scuttle; and Bevil Goring, in his

hut in the infantry lines—a hut in which he chummed with Jerry Wilmot—lay awake far into the hours of the morning, till the cannon announcing dawn boomed from Gun Hill over the sleeping camp, thinking again and again of the little promenade round the old house at Chilcote, the eyes that had looked so sweetly into his; of the little he had hinted—still more of the vast amount he had left unsaid, and marvelling when again he should see Alison Cheyne.

The fact is that Bevil Goring was very much in love—certainly more than he had ever been in his life before, and frankly confessed to himself that he had been 'hit at last, and hit very hard indeed.'

Thus it may be imagined how much he felt stung when next day at breakfast, while the trio were talking of the day before, Dalton said, quite unwittingly—

'Mrs. Trelawney assured me that it is almost completely arranged that Miss Cheyne is to become the wife of Lord Cadbury,

who can make a princely settlement upon her; while her father is, we all know, so poor.'

'What selfishness—what sacrilege!' exclaimed Jerry, slashing the top off an egg, 'to sacrifice her to that old duffer!'

'For her father's sake I have little doubt the girl will comply—she seems of a most affectionate nature.'

Bevil Goring sat silent; but these remarks sank deeply into his heart.

'Does Mrs. Trelawney approve of these arrangements?' asked Jerry, after a pause.

'I cannot say—but I should rather think not.'

'To me she seems to have been singularly unhappy in her short married life.'

'What makes you think so?'

'I scarcely know—but feel certain that I am right.'

'Now wouldn't you like very much to console her, Jerry?'

'You are the last man, Tony, in whom I

would confide concerning the fair widow,’ said Jerry, angrily; ‘but there goes the bugle for parade, and, by Jove, our fellows are falling in!’

‘When her hair is grey—if it ever becomes grey—and all her youth is gone, that woman will still be beautiful,’ exclaimed Dalton, with enthusiasm.

Mrs. Trelawney was wont to drive over every other day when the weather was fine and take Alison—she knew the lonely life the girl led—away with her to afternoon tea, to lawn tennis at the Vicarage or elsewhere, or drive by Farnborough and Aldershot Camp. And, with reference to future points in our story, we may add that this sprightly lady resided at Chilcote Grange, a pretty modern villa about a mile distant from the mansion of Sir Ranald, whither she had recently come after a long sojourn abroad, or in the Channel Islands, as some said, for no one knew precisely about her antecedents.

Notwithstanding all her real, or pretended, aversion to matrimony, and love of that freedom which the demise of 'the late lamented Trelawney' seemed to have given her, the handsome widow, by more than one mutual invitation to her 'afternoon teas,' &c., unknown to Sir Ranald and Lord Cadbury, gave Bevil Goring an opportunity of meeting Alison Cheyne which he might not have otherwise enjoyed.

Alison had read of love and thought of it (as what young girl does not?), and Bevil Goring seemed to her the beau-ideal of all she had pictured in her imagination a lover or a husband ought to be. True it is, this idea might be born of his undoubted fancy for herself, and the impulsive nature of Alison forbade her to love or do anything else by halves.

Already she thought of him and spoke of him to herself as 'Bevil,' and then paused and blushed at the conviction that she did

so. But then was not the name a quaint and strange one?

Dalton had called at Chilcote Grange and left his card; the widow was from home, and, as he did not leave the gift he had promised her little daughter, she smiled, as she well knew that he meant to call again.

‘Laura,’ said Alison, as she saw the card, ‘I am certain that Captain Dalton admires you—Nay, loves you, from what Bevil, I mean Captain Goring, tells me. He talks of you incessantly.’

‘Yet he has only seen me once or twice.’

‘Quite enough to achieve that end.’

‘How, child?’

‘You are so very beautiful,’ said Alison, patting the widow’s cheek playfully.

‘How strange that you should say so!’

‘Why strange?’

‘I mean that one woman should so much admire another. Had you been a man it

might be natural enough, and understandable too.'

'But why not a woman?' persisted Alison.

'Women are often too petty—too jealous generally of each other; but you are a dear pet, Alison, and admire those whom you love. As for Dalton, he has seen so little of me—here at least.'

'What! has he met you *elsewhere*?' asked Alison, quickly.

'No; I have not said so,' replied Mrs. Trelawney, colouring deeply for a moment.

'But your words seemed to imply this, Laura.'

'They implied nothing—I scarcely know what I said; but as for praising me, Alison,' said Mrs. Trelawney, to turn the conversation apparently, 'you can well afford to do so; but if I were to be denuded of my borrowed plumes, my gay dresses, and general make-up, I might cut a sorry figure perhaps, while you in the bloom of your girlhood—'

‘Require all that bloom, Laura; if my good looks, and the impression they may make, depended on all the finery poor papa can give me, I should cut but a sorry figure too.’

Then both laughed as they turned to the mirror above the mantelpiece, that reflected two faces, which, though different in style, contour, and colour, were both lovely indeed, and the owners thereof felt that they were so.

From thenceforward no solicitation could prevail upon Alison Cheyne to ride one of Lord Cadbury’s horses again, passionately as she loved equestrian exercise; and her persistent refusal greatly puzzled the amorous peer, and annoyed Sir Ranald.

Two longings grew strong in the girl’s heart—one to be rich and independent of all monetary considerations, as her family once was; the other, that her father would moderate his ambition to their present circumstances, and cease repining; but pride

made him revolt against them, as not being the inevitable, while she had—as he thought—a well-gilded coronet lying at her feet.

As to any secret fancies Alison might have, or her 'chance-medley' friend Captain Goring either, he barely gave them a minute's consideration, as being too preposterous, if indeed he considered them at all.

Goring had no one to consult or regard—father, nor mother, nor brother; he was alone in the world now, and the entire master of his own means, if somewhat slender, and he longed now indeed for some one to love, and love him in return.

He brooded over the past, and it *was* a strange coincidence that he should have worn for so long a time, in that far away land of the sun, Ellon's ring with *her* hair and her likeness in it, all unknown to himself; and of that circumstance he was never weary pondering, and drawing therefrom much romantic and lover-like comfort.

It seemed to establish a link—a tie—between them !

But Bevil remembered what he had seen of Cadbury at Chilcote ; this latter's presents incidentally referred to ; his proffered mounts, and, more than all, the observations of Mrs. Trelawney and others ; hence his tongue was tied and his heart seemed to die within him. What had he compared with Cadbury to offer worthy the consideration of a man like Sir Ranald Cheyne ?

He had not been slow to divine, to detect, the footing on which the former stood with the latter—a proud, impoverished, and embittered man, and a lover's active imagination, full of fears and doubts and jealousies, did the rest.

He actually avoided Chilcote, for he knew that any intercourse there would be restricted and restrained.

'To meet her again and again is only playing with fire,' he thought. 'For her own sake and mine it is a perilous game.'

But the moth would go to the candle, and while avoiding Chilcote he often rode over to the Grange, where, however, he never had yet an opportunity of seeing Alison quite alone, for, if no one else was present, she had always little Netty Trelawney hovering about her or hanging on to her skirts.

When he did fail, as sometimes happened, to see Alison, he was almost glad and yet sorry, for her pale and thoughtful face haunted him and filled his heart with a great longing to comfort her, for somehow he thought she wanted comfort, and to tell her of his love, though the matter should end there, and she tell him to go—go—and never address her again, as he too surely feared that the story of *his* love was one she dared not, must not, listen to.

One day—he never forgot it—he was leaving the Grange, walking slowly, with the bridle of his horse over his arm, when he came suddenly upon her of whom his

thoughts were full, about to enter the gate from the roadway.

'Alison !'

The name, all softly uttered, and with infinite tenderness, seemed to escape him unconsciously as he lifted his hat.

'Captain Goring,' said Alison, looking up, her pleasure blending with alarm in her face, 'you must not call me thus. What would people think?'

'Pardon me,' said he, as he took her hand, while colouring nearly as deep as herself. To resist improving the unexpected opportunity, however, was impossible, so after a little pause, he said—

'It seems an age since I saw you last.'

'Don't exaggerate, Captain Goring. We met at Laura's only four days ago.'

'Four centuries they have seemed to me. I suppose you walk often in these beautiful woods of Chilcote?'

'Oh, yes, in summer especially ; but the leaves are nearly gone now.'

‘And in autumn—where?’

‘In the woods too; but in the broad walk that leads towards the church.’

‘The walk with the stately old beeches?’

‘Yes.’

It was the vista she had shown him from the little terrace.

‘And *when* do you generally go there?’ he asked, in lower voice, while his hand closed over hers.

‘A little before noon,’ she replied, in a whispered voice.

‘To-morrow, then,’ said he, seeking for the eyes that now avoided his, and with a heart beating lightly he galloped along the road towards the camp.

Next day Alison sought her usual walk with a strange palpitation in her bosom, as if something was about to happen; and she had a timid fear of being seen—of being watched like one who was about to commit a crime—a great error perhaps; and yet for the life of her she could not fail to keep the

appointment, for such her poor little heart told her it was.

The day was wonderfully bright and beautiful for the season; streaming through the giant beeches the rays of the sunshine quivered on the green grass and brown fern; there was a hum of insect life still, and the twitter of sparrows, while an occasional rabbit shot to and fro.

The time passed slowly, till Alison thought she could hear the beating of her heart; for it seemed as if she and the rabbits, the sparrows and the insects, were to have all the glade to themselves; when suddenly she heard the gallop of a horse, and in another moment Bevil Goring had sprung from his saddle and taken her hand.

‘My darling, my darling, I knew you would come,’ he exclaimed, with tenderness in his tone and passion in his eyes, ‘may I call you Alison now?’

She did not reply audibly, but the quick rose-leaf tint—one of her greatest beauties

—swept over her soft cheek and delicate neck, rising even to her little ears while he repeated—

‘May I call you Alison now—my own Alison—when I tell you that I love you?’

He kissed her tenderly on the forehead, the eyes, and lips again and again; and, then suddenly drawing a little way from him, she covered her face with her white hands and began to sob heavily.

‘You love me, don’t you?’ he asked, imploringly.

‘Yes, Bevil,’ she replied, in a broken voice; and he, transported to hear his Christian name for the first time on her lips, pressed her to his breast, while she submitted unresistingly, but added, ‘I must come here no more now—no more!’

‘Why, my love?’

‘It is wrong to papa.’

‘Surely you will see me again, darling—surely you will not accept my love and give me up at the same moment? I shall speak

to Sir Ranald, if you will permit me.’

‘Useless—useless; you would but precipitate my fate.’

‘Your fate—what is that?’

‘I don’t know—I don’t know,’ moaned the girl, in sore bewilderment, while the thin aristocratic face of her father, with his keen, blue, inquiring eyes, gold *pince-nez* and all, seemed to rise before her.

‘I am not rich I know, Alison darling.’

‘And I have been used to the want of riches nearly all my life, and now—now—I must go.’

‘Already! You will be here to-morrow?’

‘Oh, no; not to-morrow.’

‘When?’

‘I cannot, dare not say.’

‘You are cruel to me, Alison,’ he exclaimed, and with one long, clinging kiss they separated—she to run down the wooded pathway like a hunted hare, and he to ride slowly off in the opposite direction.

He came to that trysting-place the next day, however, and the next too, but no Alison was there, and he could only surmise wildly, and perhaps wide of the truth, what detained her.

Had she been watched? Had their meetings been overseen, overheard?

He knew not precisely how it was with Alison, whom he regarded with a species of adoration, but deep in his heart sank the delightful consciousness that his love pleased her, and that when they did meet again it should have some firmer basis than that brief and stolen meeting had given it. He now understood much of the shyness and timidity her manner had of late exhibited. He hoped now that he also understood the half veiled light that had filled her grey-blue eyes at his approach, and the sweet roseate flush that crossed her cheek, to leave it paler than before.

She would soon learn to love him fully and confidently, and he would be content

to wait for the coming joy of a regular engagement. But how about Sir Ranald Cheyne's views; how about Cadbury's too probable offers; how about 'the Fate' which, with a broken voice, she said the knowledge of his love for her would but anticipate?

CHAPTER VII.

JERRY AND THE WIDOW.

ALISON'S tears, agitation, and fears, together with her admission that he was far from indifferent to her—the memory of their mutual kisses, and all that had passed so briefly, sank deeply into the heart of Bevil Goring, who thought the secret terms on which they now were, if they were to meet again, as he could not doubt, were ridiculous to himself and derogatory to her.

His natural impulses of honour led him to think he should at once address Sir Randal on the subject; but the girl's dread of his doing so made him pause. He thought

he would consult Dalton or Wilmot on the subject; but the former was on duty, and the latter was full of his own affairs; for Jerry, in fact, had made up his mind to propose—to Mrs. Trelawney!

Jerry made a more than usually careful toilette that forenoon, and was more than ever irreproachable in the matters of boots, gloves, studs, and collar, even to the waxen flower at his button-hole—all with the aid of his soldier valet, Larry O'Farrel, whom he had just found deep in the columns of the *Aldershot Military Gazette*.

'Any news, O'Farrel?' asked Jerry, as he rasped his thick hair with a pair of ivory-handled brushes to adjust the parting of his back hair.

'Only that the Sultan of Turkey is dead, sir.'

'The deuce he is—died of want of breath, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir; strangled or something of that kind, sir.'

· Well, O'Farrel, would you like to be Sultan of Turkey? The berth would suit you, for, like the Bradies,

“You'd make a most iligant Turk,
Being fond of tobacco and ladies.”

‘Shouldn't mind, sir, if the pay and allowances was good.’

‘Well,’ said Jerry, who was in excellent spirits with himself and the world at large, ‘send in your application in proper form through me as the captain of your company, and in time I have not the slightest doubt you will be O'Farrel the First.’

Jerry said all this so gravely and impressively that, though used to his jokes, not a smile spread over the face of Larry, who raised his right hand in salute while standing erect as a pike.

He had heard about the Champac necklace and the proposed second visit of Tony Dalton, so he resolved to anticipate his brother officer, to ‘turn his flank,’ if possi-

ble, for Jerry was never more in love in his life, or thought himself so.

He had been dazzled by the notice the brilliant widow had taken of himself ever since the last Divisional Steeple Chase meeting, at which he first met her, and had lost 'no end' of gloves to her in bets on the 'Infantry Hunt;' her coquettish familiarity, the rapidity with which she adopted him as it were, and slid into making him do errands for her, calling him by his Christian name or the abbreviation thereof, 'Jerry' (which sounded so sweetly on her charming scarlet lips), her *œillades* and tricks with her fan when she tapped his arm or cheek therewith, were all things to think pleasantly of, and served to encourage him.

'Hang it all,' thought Jerry; 'why shouldn't I open the trenches and make my innings now?'

So he got into his mail-phaeton, and drove leisurely through the North Camp. Dalton was on guard that day, and saw Jerry, of

whose mission he had not then the least idea, fortunately, as his own mind was full of Mrs. Trelawney; he gave Jerry a cigar from his case, exchanged a word or two, and saw him turn away into Aldershot—intent on his own destruction, as some of the mess might have said.

‘I am awfully spooney,’ thought Jerry, as he tooled along the level highway, flicking his high-stepper’s ears with the lash of his whip. ‘She is certainly a lovely woman, and would make a creditable wife to me, and be quite a feature at all the garrison balls and cricket matches; but what the deuce will the mess think of Netty—of me having a daughter nearly half as old as myself! There’s the rub! She is a pretty little thing just now, but will be awfully in the way ten years hence, when all my aim in life may be to marry her to some coal or iron man, or any fellow that will have her.’

And Jerry was laughing softly to himself at this idea as he drew up at the door of

Chilcote Grange, and threw the reins to his tiny top-booted tiger.

Mrs. Trelawney was 'at home,' and in a few minutes Jerry found himself face to face with her, in all her bloom and radiance, seated on a sofa in her charming little drawing-room, the appurtenances of which were all in excellent taste, so far as couches, pretty chairs, fragile tables, curtains, lace, and statuettes could make it, and pretty landscapes hung on the walls with blue ribbons in lieu of cords; and then Mrs. Trelawney's tightly-fighting costume of dark blue, which showed the exquisite outline of her bust and shoulders, was perfect, from the ruche of soft tulle round her delicate neck to the dainty slippers which encased her handsome feet.

The brightness of her smile encouraged Jerry, who, after a few well-turned expressions of pleasure at seeing her looking so well, lost no time in 'opening the trenches,' for he was, though a young fellow, a remarkably cool hand.

The widow's bright hazel eyes dilated with surprise for a moment, and then their white lids and long silky lashes drooped, as if to veil the amusement that sparkled in them, as she withdrew her hand, of which Jerry had possessed himself, and said—

‘Oh, Mr. Wilmot, are you in earnest?’

‘Could I dare to be anything else in addressing you thus? Earnest—can you ask me!—always when with you, and you know how much I love you. Will you marry me?’

‘My dear Jerry, don't be foolish! You are but a boy compared with me, in my experience as a woman of the world especially. It is too absurd!’

‘If you are older than me at all, it can only be by a year or two,’ said Jerry, who thought it was not such a difficult matter to propose as he had first deemed it; ‘and so, dearest Laura——’

‘You must not address me thus.’

‘But don't you call me Jerry?’

‘There is a difference, and I may never do so again.’

‘Don’t say so; besides you cannot help me thinking of you as “Laura”?’

‘Thought is free, but speech is not.’

‘You will ever be Laura in my thoughts and in my heart, whatever you may be on my lips.’

Jerry said this with so much emotion that Mrs. Trelawney ceased to laugh at him, and gave her hand, saying,

‘Jerry, let us be friends; be assured we can be nothing more, and, indeed, nothing better.’

Jerry retained her soft hand lovingly, and, taking heart of grace therefrom, said,

‘I shall speak of this matter again, Laura. I see that I quite deserve your refusal.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I spoke too soon—too abruptly.’

‘Believe me, dear Jerry, my answer is a final one. I could never bestow on you the love a wife should feel for her husband.’

‘That would come in time—after marriage, Laura.’

‘No, it cannot be; leave me and forget me.’

‘That is impossible. I shall never, while life lasts, forget you.’

Mrs. Trelawney felt an inclination to laugh again. She controlled her lips, but her half-closed eyes were sparkling with a smile.

‘I am unworthy the regard I have won. Thrust me from your thoughts, Jerry, and forget me, I pray you, forget me,’ said she, emphatically, as she again withdrew her hand.

‘I have been a fool!’ exclaimed Jerry, bitterly, as he twisted his dark moustache and betrayed considerable emotion, at least for him.

‘Oh, no,’ said Mrs. Trelawney, patting his shoulder with her fan. ‘You are no worse than other men. You could not help it, if I was silly enough to be—shall I say it?—

amused, perhaps pleased, by all your tender speeches, though I could not believe in them.'

Jerry stared at her in doubt whether to be indignant or not, but again her beauty and *espièglerie* of manner triumphed.

'Oh, Laura, once again,' he was resuming, when she interrupted him—

'I know all you would say, but please not to renew this subject, or I shall lose all faith in you, Captain Wilmot.'

'Say "Jerry,"' he urged.

'Well, then, Jerry, I like you very much,' she said, coquettishly, and with an infinite sweetness of tone; 'but I shall be sorry if your persistence makes me view you differently.'

'If you like me so very much, why cannot you marry me? You would like me ever so much more afterwards.'

'It is impossible,' said Mrs. Trelawney, smiling openly now.

'Why are you so hard-hearted?'

‘I am *not* hard-hearted. I am indifferent, that is all—what I have been made by others.’

‘What others?’

‘That is my secret. But here come visitors,’ said she, rising and presenting her hand. ‘And let us part, Jerry, as I hope we shall meet again—good friends.’

In a few minutes Jerry was tooling back to the camp again.

‘Her manner is deuced mysterious,’ thought he, in great perplexity. ‘What can she mean? She spoke of herself as “unworthy,” too. Has she a husband somewhere, after all? Oh, the devil! That can’t be.’

‘Where have you been, Jerry?’ asked Dalton, who was again loitering in front of the guard-hut at the camp gate, with a cigar between his lips, and saw his friend coming slowly along, with the reins dropped on his horse’s neck.

‘I have been at Chilcote Grange,’ said Jerry, almost sulkily.

‘The deuce you have,’ said Dalton, with surprise.

‘There is nothing new in that.’

‘Calling, were you?’

‘Yes, and proposing to the widow *la belle* Trelawney.’

‘Nonsense!’ exclaimed Dalton.

‘A fact though.’

‘And with what success?’ asked Dalton, his colour changing perceptibly.

‘None at all, old fellow; bowled out; thrown over—I may trust to your silence, I know—fairly laughed at me, and won’t have me at any price, by Jove.’

‘Proposed, and was refused,’ said Dalton, as if speaking to himself.

‘Proposed right off the reel, whatever that may mean, and was refused. But I don’t mean to break my heart over it,’ added Jerry, twirling and untwirling the long lash of his whip.

‘And what do you mean to do?’

‘Make love to some one else—get tight at the mess to-night—tight as a drum. So you may go in and win at a canter, if you choose.’

‘Thanks, Jerry; but I don’t mean to propose to the widow,’ said Dalton, laughing. ‘She has some history of her own, I think.’

‘So do I,’ said Jerry, angrily; ‘and it is bad form for women to have histories or mysteries either.’

‘Sour grapes, Jerry,’ said Dalton, still laughing.

‘I thought you were hit a little in that quarter yourself, Tony; but I am much mistaken if there is not more in her life than you know, or any of us is ever likely to know.’

Dalton, though secretly pleased that Jerry had not met with success, was also secretly provoked at what he deemed the young fellow’s over-confidence. He had felt himself—he knew not why—curiously

affected when in the presence of Laura Trelawney; there was a subtle influence in her voice and smile that wakened old memories and strangely bewildered him; and especially when she sang, these stole over him and seemed to take tangible form.

‘And now, I suppose,’ said Jerry, as he manipulated a cigar, ‘I must just do as she probably did when the “late lamented” took himself off.’

‘What is that?’

‘“Drop some natural tears and wipe them soon,” as Milton has it.’

‘I’ll give you another quotation, Jerry—what does Abou Adhem say?’

‘Don’t know—never heard of the fellow.’

‘“Your lost love is neither the beginning nor ending of life. Several things remain to you. She is false, and you are the victim. Very good. Nature is not going into bankruptcy; the sun will rise and set just the same; corn will grow, birds sing, and the rain fall just as before, My experience

is, that it's a toss up that you are not the better without her, and she not better without *you*."'

'Likely enough, Tony; but, as "Cœlebs in search of a wife," I need not go *there* any more,' half grumbled Jerry, as he whipped up his high-stepper and bowled away through the long street of huts to his quarters; while to Dalton's graver mind there seemed to be something intensely comical in the equanimity with which he took his repulse.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘FOR EVER AND FOR EVER.’

OF a very different nature in its depth and passion was a love-scene which was taking place not very far distant from the Grange at about the same time.

Alison Cheyne, we have said, had ceased to take her walk beside the beeches, though her heart yearned for it, and she knew well who was too probably loitering and watching there; so Bevil Goring, at all risks, wrote her a passionate and imploring letter to meet him once again at the same place and hour, with an alternation of days in case of engagements or interruption; and this missive came to her when Alison, who

loved him with all her woman's heart, was wondering hourly how she could get through day after day without him.

'At last! at last!' was the exclamation of each as the tryst was kept, and they met again.

Their hearts were beating fast, and in unison, but in silence, and, if the meeting was a secret and a stealthy one, it was all the more thrilling to both. They were silent for a time, we say, but the silence was not without its eloquence, if the paradox may be used. There was the mystic communion of souls—the touch of hand that closed on hand, of lip that clung to lip—lips that knew not how to utter all that hovered there unsaid.

'You got my letter, darling?' said Bevil, after a time.

'I could not have been here else; but, for heaven's sake, do not write to me again,' said Alison, imploringly.

'Why?'

‘For fear of papa; my correspondents are so few, his suspicions might be excited.’

‘How hard is this!—surely we might write to each other occasionally,’ urged Bevil, caressing her.

‘No, my dearest; I dislike the idea of a correspondence that is clandestine, however romantic it may be; and if papa discovered it he would deem it so dishonourable in me—so dishonourable to himself.’

‘But you will meet me?’

‘I shall try, Bevil—I shall try; oh, I cannot help coming to meet you now.’

‘Allow me, darling, till I can place *another* there!’ exclaimed Bevil, as he slipped a ring on her engagement finger.

‘Oh, Bevil,’—but whatever she was about to say he stopped in a very effectual manner.

‘You will wear this for my sake,’ he whispered.

‘I will, darling.’

‘Say always.’

‘Always, Bevil—for ever and for ever—

and—and,' she added, smiling shyly through her tears that mingled love, joy; and something of terror caused to well up in her beautiful eyes, 'you will take this from me (I brought it on purpose), poor Ellon's ring—the ring you wore so long without knowing whose face and hair were hidden in it.'

'It was an omen of what was to come, love Alison—an omen that we were to meet, and that you should be mine—mine only!' he replied, embracing her with ardour.

They had now become a little more composed and a little more coherent.

'I have expectations, of course—every fellow has,' said Bevil Goring, as they wandered on slowly hand in hand; 'but mine are perhaps too remote to suit the views, and may be opposed to the ambition, of Sir Ranald; yet I love you so dearly, so desperately, darling, that if you will wait for me only a year—I ask no more—I shall hope to claim you publicly or set you free.'

A captain with only a hundred or two besides his pay could scarcely hope to wed your father's daughter, Alison. Let our engagement be a secret one, as you dread an open one. It is not honourable in me to tie you thus, but what *can* I do? Separation now would be a kind of death to me; and oh, Alison, I love you so!

'And I you, Bevil;' then she added, in a broken voice, 'We have had great sorrow, great trouble, we Cheynes, and they have made papa what he is; but I can remember when things were very different, when we were not so poor as we are now, and when he—poor old darling!—had much more of life and spirit in him.'

And so, while replying to Bevil's downward glances of love and tenderness, she pressed closely to his side, with her fingers interlaced upon his arm, in the assured confidence of their mutual relations to each other, as they sauntered towards a more sequestered part of the coppice.

Let the dark future hold what it might of severance, tears, and futile longings, for that fleeting time Bevil was hers and she was his—his own!

And so they parted an engaged pair, he not at all foreseeing, and she only fearing, the gathering cloud that overhung them both. Her elderly admirer was in London then. Parliament was sitting, and she, freed from his visits, abandoned herself to the full enjoyment of the present.

She now wore a new ring, a handsome diamond hoop with a guard, upon the third finger of her left hand; but this was unnoticed by Sir Ranald, though it did not escape the sharper eyes of Mrs. Trelawney, who more than once caught her young friend toying with the trinket—turning it to and fro round her slender finger, while regarding it with a sweet, loving, and dreamy expression of face which told its own tale.

But, if Mrs. Trelawney was reticent on

the subject of her suspicion, Alison was still more so, and locked her secret in her own breast.

With all the joy of the new position, however, there was more than one element in it from which her sensitive nature shrank.

First, a secret understanding had been established between her and a gentleman friend—as yet deemed only a visitor at Chilcote—unknown to her father and to others. Second, it had not been discovered as yet, but might not always remain so, and thus eventually cause an *esclandre*; and to her it seemed that to make and keep successive appointments—sweet and delicious though they were—that must be kept secret was in itself something wrong and unladylike; but she was the victim circumstances had made her.

At times it seemed very ‘bad form,’ as the phrase went—a want perhaps of self-respect; and yet Bevil Goring was so tender, so loving, so unlike, she thought, every

other man in the world that she must risk it all, he was so dear to her.

And then she would dream of the happiness it would be if he were openly accepted by Sir Ranald as her *fiancé*—the joy of seeing him freely come and freely go a welcome guest at Chilcote, the future member of her own family, the future prop of her father's declining years, taking the place of Ranald and of Ellon; but would such ever—ever be?

On the other hand, Bevil Goring, who was not without a moderate show of proper pride, was not without some similar thoughts, and rather resented the position in which they were placed, giving their solemn engagement the aspect of a rustic flirtation with its furtive meetings; and, after all he had seen of the world, he thought it absurd for him and perilous for the girl he loved so tenderly.

He called at studied or stated intervals at Chilcote, but for Sir Ranald ostensibly; and

when in the presence of the latter he and Alison had to act a part and talk the merest commonplaces, with the memory in their hearts and on their lips of passionate and burning kisses exchanged but an hour perhaps before.

They seemed thus to lead two lives—one to the world and another to themselves; but a time was rapidly approaching when a rough end would be put to all their little secrets.

‘Captain Goring seems to send you bouquets and music pretty often, I think?’ said Sir Ranald, rather suspiciously, one day.

‘Yes, papa,’ said she, feeling herself grow pale under the glance he gave through his inevitable *pince-nez*; ‘our garden yields so little in the way of flowers, at this season especially. I can’t afford, you know, to buy much music, cheap as it is, and—and——’

‘There you go! reminding me of our

poverty again,' said he, in a snappish tone; 'but flowers and music have both meanings—at least, they had in my time,' he added, turning away and thinking, 'I cannot permit her, for a mere girl's fancy—if a fancy she *has*—to throw away Cadbury Court and thirty thousand a year—egad, no!'

Of the City man's coronet he thought little—the Cheynes of Essilmont required no coronets to enhance their old heraldic glories; but the City man's bank-book and acquired acres were a very different matter for consideration now!

CHAPTER IX.

A REPRIEVE FOR A TIME.

‘**WE** dine with Cadbury at the Court to-morrow—no party, just ourselves—sharp six—an early dinner,’ said Sir Ranald to Alison, just as she returned from a meeting with Bevil Goring at the beeches.

‘Very well, papa,’ replied the girl, though she felt herself shiver with anticipation of the annoyance to which she might be subjected; ‘has he returned so soon?’

‘He—who?’

‘Lord Cadbury.’

‘Yes; Parliament has been suddenly prorogued.’

In her heart she was sorry to hear it.

‘The carriage will come for us punctually,’ he added, regarding her earnestly, as he thought regretfully—when did he ever cease to do so?—of his own family carriage, with its hammercloth and heraldic insignia, and his dismay when Lady Cheyne—Alison’s ailing mother—was first compelled to walk afoot or take a common cab.

And old Archie Auchindoir groaned at the recollection thereof too, when he came to announce, with a snort, that ‘the Cawd-burly machine was at the porch.’

Alison sighed as she entered it; an invitation to dinner was a small affair, but she felt as if the links of a chain were beginning to close around her while the easily-hung carriage rolled on between the hedgerows in the starlight.

‘If his lordship makes any proposition to you to-night, I trust that for my sake, if not for your own, you will not, at least, insult him,’ said Sir Ranald, breaking the silence suddenly.

‘Papa—insult him!’ exclaimed Alison, in a breathless voice, knowing but too well that the term ‘proposition’ meant a proposal, and her heart seemed to die within her as she pressed to her lips, in the dark, Bevil’s engagement ring.

‘For your sake and mine consider well and favourably his lordship’s views,’ said her father again.

She remained silent, fearing that the note her father had received must have contained something more than the mere invitation to dinner.

‘I shall lose the half of my life, Alison, when I lose you, but I must make up my mind for it one of these days.’

Still she made no response, for her heart was away in a most unromantic-looking hut in the infantry lines at Aldershot, where, in fancy, she saw a handsome young fellow, his dark hair cropped close, his skin almost olive in tint, and smooth as a girl’s, dark eyes and straight black eyebrows with thick

lashes, a heavy moustache, and altogether with a dark manly beauty about him that would have become the costume of Titian or Velasquez, like the cavalier brothers in the portraits at Chilcote.

Through the large square entrance-hall of Cadbury Court, which was panelled with oak, and hung round above the panelling with the old family portraits of former proprietors, and had tall jars of curiously painted china standing in the deep old window bays, with a great lantern of stained glass shining overhead, they were ushered into the magnificent drawing-room, where Lord Cadbury, in evening costume, hobbled from an easy chair to receive them with no small *empressement*, for, though his age of ardour was past, he had not survived that of covetousness; and among other things now coveted was Alison, whom vanity prompted him to seek that he might exhibit her to society as a conquest.

Alison's drapery seemed to have a soft sweep in it; she held her fair head high; a scornful curl hovered on her lip, and yet she seemed a fragile thing to have so haughty a spirit.

She wore again—for, poor girl, her wardrobe was most limited—the lustreless silk with its rare old lace, and, though harassed, she looked charming in her pale beauty, while almost destitute of ornaments, save a few silver bangles on her slender wrists, for the family jewels—especially the Essilmont diamonds—were all things of the past, and had long since found their way to shop windows in Bond Street; but she wore at her neck a little circular brooch of snow-white pearls from the Ythan, near Ellon.

The grandeur and luxury which surrounded the *parvenu* lord at times irritated Sir Ranald curiously, though from sheer desperation and selfishness he longed for the hour when his daughter should share them;

thus he was sometimes prompted to say sharp—almost sneering—things to his prospective son-in-law.

‘My old and infernal foe—(pardon me, Miss Cheyne)—is with me again,’ said Cadbury, as he hobbled back to his seat.

‘Who—what?’ asked Sir Ranald.

‘The gout—they say it comes with ease and money.’

‘With years too, Cadbury—one can’t have everything as they would wish it,’ replied Sir Ranald, with a gush of ill-humour; ‘all men, we are told, “are on the road which begins with the cradle and ends with the grave; and, in some instances, the world would be better were the distance between the two shorter.”’

‘Pon my soul, Cheyne, you are unpleasant,’ replied the peer, not precisely knowing what to make of this aphorism; ‘but there goes the gong for dinner,’ and, drawing Alison’s hand over his arm, he led the way to the dining-room; ‘and so you have quite de-

clined all my offers of a mount, Miss Cheyne?' said he, in a voice of would-be reproachful tenderness, 'though I have put my entire stables at your disposal.'

'Yes—a thousand thanks.'

'Your taste has changed; or are you weary of the spins round Twesildon Hill and Aldershot way! Some of them are pretty stiff, I believe.'

Alison coloured at the, perhaps chance, reference to Aldershot, but seated herself on her host's right hand, and made no reply.

The slow elaboration of the dinner, with its many *entrées* and courses, though it was perfect from the maraschino to the coffee; the two tall solemn servants in resplendant liveries (like theatrical properties) in attendance upon them, and the silent butler in the background, all oppressed Alison.

'Fine old place this of yours, Cadbury—dates from Charles II., I believe,' said Sir Ranald, looking approvingly round the stately dining-room, and then glancing at his si-

lent daughter's face; 'it exhibits all the chastened grandeur that only comes by long inheritance, and was not built in a day like the palace of Aladdin.'

'It matters little when built,' replied Cadbury, bluntly, who felt a taunt in the remark, and knew precisely how Sir Ranald viewed his recent title. 'It comes to me out of Cornhill and Threadneedle Street; and I believe that Miss Cheyne will agree with me that it is better to have industrious than expensive forefathers—hewers of wood and drawers of water, though some may deem them. Bosh! Sir Ranald—all men come from Adam,' added Cadbury, who, though a peer, was somewhat of a Radical in his proclivities.

'In these points you and I differ,' said Sir Ranald, stiffly, as he sipped his glass of dry Moselle.

'In this age of the world, a fellow with a pedigree is exactly like a potato,' said Lord Cadbury, laughing.

‘How do you mean?’

‘That the best part of the plant is underground.’

Sir Ranald coloured with annoyance up to his pale temples, and said—

‘I am astonished that you should indulge in such bad form as proverbs; and, as for pedigrees, I never knew any man undervalue them if he ever had one—real or pretended——’

Alison, fearing the conversation was taking an unpleasant turn, looked at her father imploringly, and said, with her brightest smile,

‘You know, papa, that in this work-a-day age, merit is better than birth.’

‘And what is the best test of merit?’ asked their host.

‘Success,’ said Alison.

‘Precisely.’

‘Not always,’ said Sir Ranald; ‘sometimes a defeat may be as glorious as a victory. Was it not said of the clans at

Culloden that in great attempts it is glorious even to fail?’

And now, as dinner proceeded, Alison, surprised by the peevish pride of her father, after his warnings in the carriage—notwithstanding the fears with which these warnings had inspired her—with all a woman’s tact, exerted herself to turn the conversation to other subjects, and addressed herself so much to her old host that he gathered hope and courage, and his face beamed with smiles; though his supposed love for Alison was not much more than a strong fancy crossed, which enhanced her value and gave a piquancy to his pursuit of her—a fancy that ere long was to be curiously combined with irritation and revenge.

Over the sideboard, which was loaded with massive plate, hung a great portrait of Sir Timothy Titcomb, the City Knight and first peer, in all his bravery of robe and chain, and aldermanic obeseness of habit; and Alison, as she looked at it, thought of

some of the stately portraits at Chilcote of the Cheynes of other days, and of the manly beauty of the two Cavalier brothers who fell in battle for the king—pale, proud, and scornful, with their lovelocks and plumed beavers, and the moment dessert was over, she stole away to the solitude of the drawing-room.

She had felt rather lonely during the protracted meal. There was no other lady present. 'Why?' she asked herself; did not ladies affect the society of the wealthy and titled bachelor? It almost seemed so.

During the meal and dessert, Alison, though her sweet face wore forced smiles, had a bitter and humiliating sense of how her father, when his peevishness subsided under the influence of good wines, changed in manner, and, with all his inborn and inordinate pride of race and utter contempt for *parvenus* and *nouveaux riches*, seemed to make himself subservient to Lord Cadbury,

assenting in the end to his views on everything.

She seated herself at the piano, but did not play, lest, though she had begun a melody of Schumann's, the 'Nachtstück,' Lord Cadbury might deem the sound a hint that she wished him by her side, and, giving way to thought, she sank into reverie.

As she looked on the splendour and luxury with which she was then surrounded, it was impossible for the young and impulsive girl not to think how pleasant it would be to see no more of duns, and debts, and genteel poverty; to be the mistress of Cadbury Court; to own such a glorious double drawing-room wherein to receive her visitors; to wear wonderful toilettes; to be always surrounded by so many curious and beautiful pictures, cabinets, and statuettes; to have an assured position beyond her own—the position that money alone can give; to be the mistress of these magnificent park lands, preserves, and pas-

tures; the hot-houses and stable-court; the terraces, with their peacocks and rosaries, all whilom part of the heritage of a proud old race that, like the Cheynes of Essil-mont, had come down in the world; to shine in society, and have always a full purse to buy whatever she fancied; but to have all these with Lord Cadbury—not Bevil Goring, as her husband!

No—no! she shivered, and thrust aside the thoughts a momentary emotion of selfishness was suggesting, as treason to him whose ring was on her finger, and exclaimed, as she pressed it to her lips:

‘Oh, that but a tithe of these things were my poor Bevil’s!’

She had been too deeply sunk in thought to hear the opening and closing of the drawing-room door, when Lord Cadbury entered alone, having left Sir Ranald dropping into his after-dinner doze in the smoking-room.

There was a listless droop—an uncon-

scious pathos in the attitude of the girl that struck even Lord Cadbury, and though a kind of child, as he deemed her, she was a stately one—a stately girl, indeed, when she chose.

The proposal he had come to make was hovering on his lips ; but a consciousness of his years on one hand, and the girl's youth on the other, rendered him suddenly diffident.

'It is coming now, I suppose—coming at last—this odious, absurd, and insulting proposal! Of course papa and he have arranged all that over their wine and nuts!' thought Alison, with annoyance and anger at her host, and no small dread of her father, who, finding her silent during the first courses of dinner, had rallied her on her abstraction.

Whatever he had come to say, something in the expression of her half-averted face crushed all the hope that wine had raised in Cadbury's heart, and, seating himself by

her side, he could only make some little apology for leaving her so long alone, and regret that he had not time to invite some other lady friend.

He then drew a little nearer her, and, noting that she had a couple of tea rose-buds in her collarette, said insinuatingly—

‘I saw that your papa is wearing one of your favourite flowers at his button-hole—may I have one also?’

‘You are not papa,’ she replied, curtly, to her half-century Romeo; ‘such little decorations seem suitable only for young folks,’ she added, ‘but I shall give you a bud with pleasure.’

And quickly her little hands put a rose-bud into the peer’s lapel, but in a mechanical and task-work manner, while there was an expression on her lips—and full, delicate, and emotional lips they were—and in her small, pale face, with its decided little chin, that prevented him from greatly appreciating the gift as a younger man would have

done; so the attempt even at flirtation fell flat.

‘Papa does so love tea-roses; we used to have such lovely ones at Essilmont,’ said Alison.

‘Your poor papa!’ said Cadbury, softly, ‘when you marry, how lonely he will be!’

Alison shrank back uneasily, as she thought of Bevil Goring, and replied—

‘I don’t mean ever to marry.’

‘Indeed! why so cruel to some one in particular? and why in any sense?’

‘I could never leave dear old papa in our—our changed circumstances; we are so much to each other.’

‘But, in marrying, you need not lose him.’

‘I don’t think he would care to share me with another.’

‘How absurd, Miss Cheyne!’

‘I mean to devote myself to him always. He is the only *old* man I shall ever care for; the only old man worth giving up my life

to. Well,' added Alison, mentally, 'that is pretty pointed surely ; if he does not take *that* hint, he will never take any.'

'But your papa cannot live for ever,' said Cadbury, not unwilling to inflict a thrust in return.

'How cruel of you to remind me of that !' exclaimed the girl, her fine eyes suffusing for a moment. 'I know that he is some years older than yourself ; but I hope he may live to the age of Old Parr !'

References to his years, even when he drew them on himself, always stung her elderly adorer, who felt his own inborn coarseness too, as compared with her serene air of distinction ; for Alison Cheyne, even when provoked to say that which for her was a sharp thing, always looked *pur sang* from her bright brown hair to her tiny feet.

The absence of even one lady to meet her had surprised the girl ; but she knew not, and neither did Sir Ranald, owing to the

isolated life he led at Chilcote, that, though fair ones from London were not unfrequent visitors at Cadbury Court, they were of a style that the ladies of the county declined to meet on any terms, which may give our readers a new insight to the general character of this hereditary legislator.

Quiet though his tone and bearing, in his past life the man had been—nay, was still—secretly a coarse libertine and a *roué*, who indulged in all the vicious propensities which his ample wealth enabled him to do.

Alison Cheyne was his last fancy, and he was determined, by fair means or foul, by marriage or trepan, that his she should be. Her father's poverty and pride, his age and growing infirmities, could all be utilised to this end, and nothing now gave him doubts of easy success but his own years, his grey hairs, and perhaps—her love for another.

‘You do not wear many rings, Miss Cheyne ; but such a hand as yours requires no ornament.’

He took her little white hand in his as he spoke—it was her left one—and regarded it admiringly ; and Alison, though trembling for what might now ensue, did not withdraw it. She thought, was not the man quite old enough to be her father ?

‘I believe greatly in pretty hands,’ said he, caressing and patting with his right hand the little white one that lay in his left.

‘So does papa. It is a hobby of his that they indicate race or culture,’ replied Alison, smiling now.

Certainly the short, thick digits of Lord Cadbury showed neither, and, poor man, he thought so, for he winced at the girl’s reply, it was so like one of Sir Ranald’s remarks ; and the gentle Alison blushed that she had made it. To do so was altogether unlike herself, but she was irritated by the whole situation.

‘That is a charming ring!’ said her host, touching Bevil Goring’s gift—the gift she prized beyond her own life.

She drew her hand away now.

‘I have in that casket a diamond hoop with opals alternately—one of remarkable size and value—and if you would permit me to offer it——’

‘Oh, no, never—thanks!’ she exclaimed, growing quite pale.

‘Why?’ he asked, with annoyance and surprise.

‘Opals are unlucky.’

‘Unlucky? This is some Scotch superstition, I suppose?’

‘It is Oriental, I believe. Moreover, I have no wish for more rings, and never accept gifts of that kind,’ she added, with some hauteur of manner.

‘I think I startled you by my entrance,’ said he, trying to recapture her hand again; but she kept them both resolutely folded before her.

‘I was in a reverie, certainly.’

‘And, posed as you were, made a most fairy-like picture,’ said he, with his head on

one side, his long white moustache almost touching her, and more decided tenderness in his tone than he had ever before adopted.

‘A fairy—would I were one!’ said Alison, a little impatiently, with a flash in her dark blue eyes, for she was in great dread of what might follow now.

‘And what would you do if you were one in reality?’ said he, passing a hand caressingly round her soft arm.

‘Do? As Robin Goodfellow, “the knavish sprite,” did.’

‘How?’

‘By one wave of my wand I should punish you for disturbing me.’

‘In what way?’ He had interlaced his pudgy fingers on her arm now.

‘By garnishing you, as he did, with Bottom’s ears,’ she replied, with something between a laugh and an angry sigh, ‘though I should decline to take the part of either Titania or Peasblossom.’

Cadbury released her arm and drew

back ; he knew not precisely what she meant, but tugged his white moustache and thought—

‘What the deuce does she mean by Bottom’s ears?’

It sounded like a rebuff, anyway, and as such he accepted it—or rather resented it.

‘Do compliments displease you?’ said he, becoming insinuating again ; ‘they are but a form of kindness.’

‘I take them from you as I would from papa ; they pass thus, although a younger man might offend.’

Cadbury, whose head was stooped towards her, erected it, lest her glance might be falling on the little bald patch which he was so terribly conscious of being apparent now, and he shivered with annoyance, and felt wrathful at the girl he was so desirous of pleasing.

‘Will you sing for me?’ said he, after a pause, ‘I am so fond of music.’

‘What shall I sing?’ asked Alison, seat-

ing herself at the piano, and glad to change the tenor of a conversation in which she felt herself ungracious.

‘One of your Scottish—one of your national songs.’

“‘Auld Robin Gray?’” she asked, mischievously.

‘No, anything but *that*. I am sick of it.’

She thought for a moment, and then dashed into another, of which one verse will suffice, and which was quite as objectionable to his lordship, though he did not understand it all.

‘There’s auld Robin Morris that dwells in yonder glen,
He’s the king o’ a’ guid fellows and choice o’ auld men,
He has gold in his coffers, he has oxen and kine,
And one bonnie lassie—his darling and mine.’

‘It is a man’s song,’ said Alison, when she had concluded the five verses, and continued to idle over the keys.

‘And I suppose auld Robin Morris might be twin brother to the other Robin,’ said

Cadbury, with ill-concealed annoyance, as he conceived there was more in the song than his ear detected.

‘It only tells the old story, my lord—the hopeless love of a handsome young fellow for a rich and lovely girl—an old man’s pride and avarice standing in the way—’ said Alison, with a soft smile playing about her lips, and thankful that her father’s entrance put an end to a most obnoxious *tête-à-tête*.

A few minutes later and Lord Cadbury’s carriage was conveying them home, but even then Alison’s annoyances did not cease.

‘Did Cadbury say anything particular to you, Alison, dear when I was having a nap to-night?’ asked Sir Ranald, suddenly breaking a silence that was rather oppressive.

‘No, papa.’

‘No! Nothing?’

‘Nothing of consequence.’

‘Did he not propose?’

‘Papa, how *can* you think of such a

thing? He is a veritable Grandfather Whitehead.'

'Think of happiness,' said her father, sharply.

'Has wealth aught to do with that?'

'A good deal—if not all. Think of living in a house like that we have just left! Think of presentation days, collar days, at Buckingham Palace, the Park, the Row, the Four-in-Hand Club by the Serpentine—luncheons at Muswell Hill, and so forth!'

Alison was silent, but full of sad and bitter thoughts.

Around her—or within her reach—she knew were gaieties in which she could have no part—the opera, the Row, the Queen's drawing-room, to which, notwithstanding her real social position, she could no more have access (without the aid of a most trustful milliner, than the daughter of a clown. But she did not repine, as her father did, that she should be debarred from all these sights and circles, so she replied,

‘Papa, as I have often said, one can live without these accessories and surroundings. I have before urged you to quit even Chilcote, and let us go home—home to Essilmont—or what remains of it,’ she added, in a broken voice, as she thought of Bevil Goring, and how a new light, bright as summer sunshine, had fallen on her life at Chilcote now.

‘Home!’ exclaimed her father, bitterly, ‘home to the crumbling mansion amid the bleak braes where the Ythan flows, to be a source of local marvel and pity in our impoverished state. No—no! better our obscurity in Hampshire; who cares about us here, or thinks about us at all, unless it’s Cadbury, who—who——’

‘What, papa?’ asked the girl, passionately.

‘Would gladly make you his wife, my darling, and render my old age easy, with some of the luxuries we possessed in other times.’

Alison shuddered at the suggestion, and again pressed her engagement ring to her lips, as if its presence were a charm, an amulet, a protection to her.

‘It is his dearest hope that you may yet journey together through life,’ urged Sir Ranald.

Alison thought that a good part of the peer’s journey had been performed already.

But no more passed. They had reached home, and, slipping his last crown piece into the palm of the servant who opened the carriage door and threw down the steps, Sir Ranald led his daughter into their home, which looked strangely small and gloomy after the mansion they had just quitted.

Alison felt that she had achieved a species of escape or reprieve, but it was only for a time. She felt certain that from first to last the dinner had been a concerted scheme, and that somehow, thanks perhaps

to her own *brusquerie*, her elderly adorer, nathless his rank and wealth, had lost courage for the time.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN DALTON.

WE have said that Tony Dalton—tall, dark, and handsome Tony, the pattern officer of his corps—had promised little Netty Trelawney an Indian necklet. He had duly called with it, and clasped round the neck of the slender girl a gold Champac necklace from Delhi, and it is difficult for those even acquainted with the *chef-d'œuvres* of the first European jewellers, to imagine the beautiful nature of these necklaces, so called from the flowers whose petals they resemble.

‘I know not how to thank you, Captain Dalton, for your kindness to Netty,’ said

the beautiful widow, with her brightest smile, 'it is much too valuable a present for a child.'

'She will not always be a child, and in the years to come——'

'The years to come; she is barely nine, and at twenty it is difficult to think of what life may be at thirty—still more at fifty,' said she, with a curious emphasis, as her eyelids drooped.

'But, like myself, you are not yet thirty,' said Dalton, 'hence we are both a long way off fifty.'

After this he rode over occasionally from the camp—it was rather an idle time with him then, before the spring drills of the next year commenced—and he seemed rapidly to establish himself at the Grange as a friend, and on a better basis than the younger man, poor Jerry Wilmot, had done, for the latter name was off even the lady's visitors' list now.

In life and history passages seem to re-

peat themselves ; thus, just as Dalton arrived one evening, he heard, through the open window, the voice of Laura Trelawney singing the old song before referred to, and with the strain there came many a memory he had been striving to forget.

‘Strange!’ he muttered; ‘that song again!’

Sweet, clear, and sad, as if it was meant for him, and him alone, her voice seemed to come floating to him in liquid melody, in pain and pathos.

Then he heard some merry voice, with which he was familiar; and as he was ushered into the pretty drawing-room, wherein Jerry met his doom, for a man who was evidently fast conceiving a *tendresse* for the brilliant Mrs. Trelawney, it was curious that he should feel a kind of relief—a kind of protection for himself, or from committing himself too far—in the casual presence of Alison Cheyne and Bevil Goring.

The former smiled brightly, and gave

Bevil a glance of intelligence as Dalton was ushered in. It was evidently, both thought, becoming a case, and Alison was already beginning to see herself a prospective bridesmaid and Bevil groomsman.

‘How curious you should all three visit me just at the same time,’ said Mrs. Trelawney.

‘I was visiting my poor,’ said Alison.

‘And came to comfort the widow and orphan on the way.’

‘Have you many recipients of your bounty, Miss Cheyne?’ said Dalton, for lack of something else to say.

‘I have little in my power ; but they are all so grateful and so good.’

‘Ah!’ said Mrs. Trelawney, ‘I don’t take so charitable a view of human nature as you do, child ; if the poor are generally virtuous, it is because they have not the guineas to be wicked with.’

‘One of your wild speeches, Mrs. Trelawney, I hope,’ said Goring ; ‘my guineas are few—thus I have a fellow-feeling.’

And, leaving the last visitor and their hostess to discuss the point *tête-à-tête*, the lovers strolled into the now somewhat desolate garden, where the fallen leaves lay thick ; but their own emotions seemed to brighten it with all the flowers that ever grew in Eden, and with the walks they were pretty familiar with now.

‘And so you were dining *en famille* at old Cadbury’s place?’ said Goring, as he drew her hand over his arm and retained it there. ‘Was it a slow affair, darling?’

‘Utterly slow,’ said Alison, with a sigh, while looking into his face with smiling eyes.

‘Tell me all about it?’

‘There is nothing to tell,’ replied Alison, feeling the while terribly conscious that there was far too much if inferences were to be drawn ; but she shrank from giving pain to her lover by relating her father’s desires and bluntly-expressed wishes, though she feared that Bevil was quite sharp enough to

suspect more than he or she admitted, else whence his questions.

And now, lover-like, their conversation, interesting only to themselves, drifted rapidly into the never-ending topic of their own passionate regard for each other, their future hopes, and certainly most vague plans, while dusk was closing round them—the soft semi-darkness of an autumnal night; yet it was full of distant sounds, and not a few sweet scents that mingled with the heavy odour of the fallen leaves.

Alison had tied a little laced handkerchief over her hair, and her eyes were beaming upward, sweetly and coquettishly, as they met the glances of her lover, who thought she looked like the sweetest picture ever painted, especially when her long lashes rested on the paleness of her cheek when she cast them down.

‘May I see you home when the time comes?’ he asked.

‘Not for worlds, Bevil darling.’

‘It is so dark.’

‘But Daisy Prune is to call for me, and we know all the roads and lanes hereabout as well as if we had made them.’

They were very, very happy just then, these two—happy in the security of each other’s love, and could little foresee the turmoil and misery a little time was to bring forth for both.

By the light of a softly-shaded lamp the other pair were *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room, maintaining a curious and disjointed conversation, as if some unuttered or unutterable secret loaded the tongue of each; and, truth to tell, the officer, who had led his men to the storming of more than one hill-fort on the vast slopes of the Hindoo Koosh—who had been wont to pot his tiger and stick his furious pig in the jungle—who had been all over India, from the Sand Heads of the Hooghly to the gates of Cabul—if he had now come on a love-making errand, was the less self-possessed of the two.

Mrs. Trelawney possessed the rare art of dressing in such dainty perfection as never woman did before, he thought; and all her toilettes seemed to harmonise so much with the time and place in which he saw them, and with his own taste.

As they conversed on indifferent subjects, a strange and subtle magnetism drew their eyes to meet from time to time in a manner that expressed or admitted much, and yet no particular word of regard—still less of love—escaped Dalton; but little Netty by her remarks sometimes made both feel very awkward, and wish that she was relegated to the region of the nursery.

The child, encouraged by his tender manner to herself—more than all, her beautiful necklet—often hung with confidence and familiarity about him, and with pretty pertinacity questioned him about his past adventures, where he had been and what he had seen, if he ever had a wife, and much more to the same effect, as if his past life

were of interest to her, as it was no doubt beginning to be to her mamma ; and on this occasion, by a simple remark, she made both feel quite uncomfortable.

Resting her elbows on his knee, and planting her little face between her hands, she looked up in his eyes and said,

‘ Captain Dalton, do you come to see me or mamma ?’

‘ I come to see both,’ replied Dalton, smiling as he stroked her bright hair.

‘ But you talk so much more to mamma than to me.’

‘ You are a little girl, Netty ; well ?’

‘ That I think—I think——’

‘ What ? A penny for your thoughts.’

‘ That you are in love with mamma. Is it so ?’

Strange to say, at this remark Dalton grew very pale, while Mrs. Trelawney, though she coloured considerably, laughed excessively at the situation thus created, but was rather surprised that Dalton failed to

take advantage of it, even to pay her, as he could easily have done, a well-turned compliment.

‘Netty seems to have quite a matrimonial interest in you, Captain Dalton,’ said she, still laughing.

‘Yes; she has more than once asked me if I ever had a wife.’

Mrs. Trelawney, while her own bright eyes were partly hidden by the shade on the globe of the lamp, was keenly scrutinizing the half-averted face of her admirer.

‘You have not been always a woman-hater?’ she asked.

‘I never was—far from it—the reverse,’ said he, hastily.

‘And yet in all those years you have never fallen in love?’

‘I never thought of it till I came back to England. One does not think of marriage up country in the land of brown squaws.’

‘And so you never thought of it?’

‘Never.’

Dalton was colouring deeply now, and she extracted his answers from him 'as if she had been extracting his teeth,' as she afterwards told Alison.

'Now, however, under better auspices, and at home, I may wish to change,' he began.

'Change what?' interrupted Mrs. Trelawney, with a curious sharpness of tone; 'to reform? I have read that we often hear of a woman marrying a man to reform him, but that no one ever heard of a man marrying a woman to reform *her*.'

Dalton felt that his love-making, if love-making it was, took a strange turn now, and that she was infusing banter or rebuke into the conversation.

'I cannot comprehend, Mrs. Trelawney, how it is that when I am with you,' said Dalton, gravely, with a soft and half-broken voice, 'there comes back upon me much of my past life, or rather a portion of it, that I would fain forget.'

‘How is this?’

‘Because you have some strange and magnetic influence over me, to which I have not as yet the key. I have sought to bury, to forget that past I refer to—to live it down——’

‘I have no wish to pry into your secrets, Captain Dalton, nor to act the part of a Father Confessor, so pray don’t confide in me,’ said Mrs. Trelawney, with a—for her—curious hardness in her usually sweet voice. ‘I have read somewhere that life itself, from the cradle to the grave, is but a kind of gloaming hour, wherein mortals grope dimly after happiness, and find it not.’

‘I would that the happiness of my future life lay in your hands, Mrs. Trelawney,’ said Dalton, with an expression of eye and tone of voice there was no mistaking.

Mrs. Trelawney did not reply, but she smiled with a curiously mingled expression of triumph, pleasure, and, strange to say, disdain, rippling over her bright face—emo-

tions to which we shall ere long have the key.

Her cheeks flushed, her lips curved with her smile, and for a moment her whole mien was that of a young girl delighted with flattery. Dalton was about to say something more, when the sudden disdain that replaced the first expression prevented him, and she said, laughingly,

‘I can give the ladies a capital addition to the creed, Captain Dalton.’

‘What is it?’

‘Never to love any man, but make all men love you; as the song has it, “Love not—the thing you love may change;” but here come Miss Cheyne and Captain Goring.’

‘A strange woman—an enigma, indeed,’ thought Dalton, who had an unpleasant suspicion that she was secretly deriding the avowal he had, perhaps, been on the point of making.

‘Oh, Alison,’ she said, suddenly, ‘you remember Bella Chevenix, the handsome,

dashing girl, who always wears rich dresses, but of green or grey tints, a muslin fichu, with a yellow rose in it, and so forth. You have heard what has happened, I suppose?’

‘That she was engaged, or nearly so, to Colonel Graves?’

‘Yes—but he has behaved disgracefully.’

‘How?’

‘What do you think her family found out?’ she asked, addressing Dalton, to his surprise.

‘That he was no colonel at all, perhaps,’ said he.

‘Oh, worse than that.’

‘Worse!—what could be worse?’

‘I do not care to think, Mrs. Trelawney—not knowing the parties—that he was a criminal, perhaps.’

‘Worse still.’

‘Good heavens, Laura!’ exclaimed Alison.

‘And he proposed for her?’

‘Yes; was it not horrible, Captain Dalton?’

‘Don’t appeal to me,’ he replied, abruptly.

‘Bella was at a ball in Willis’s Rooms, dancing with Wilmot, of Captain Dalton’s regiment, while the colonel was there *vis-à-vis* with some one else, and Jerry, in the most casual way, asked her if she knew Mrs. Graves. Bella thought he was talking nonsense, but it turned out to be truth, as there is a Mrs. Graves; but, as Bella is a professional beauty, luckily, her affections were not too deeply engaged. However, such affairs are a warning to us all in society. Don’t you think so, Captain Dalton?’

But for the shaded lamp, the sudden paleness that overspread the handsome face of Dalton would have been apparent to all at this anecdote of Mrs. Trelawney, who saw that his eyes drooped, and that not even his heavy moustache concealed the quiver of his lip as he took his hat and prepared to retire.

‘How strange Captain Dalton looks!’ whispered Alison to Goring, as they were parting.

‘Yes; poor Tony has become a changed man, moody and irritable, since he has known your friend, Mrs. Trelawney. He is no longer the quiet, gentle, and easy-going fellow he used to be. And now, once again, good-bye, my darling.’

And with a pressure of the hand, a kiss snatched, all the sweeter for being so, they parted, knowing when and where they were to meet again.

Whatever was the secret, unrevealed yet, that hung on Dalton’s heart, he left the house of Mrs. Trelawney with a heaviness of soul and gloom of manner that were but too apparent to Bevil Goring. There was a baffled and dismayed expression in his face that made him all unlike his old soldierly self, and on his lips there was an unuttered vow that he would go near Chilcote Grange no more—a vow, however, that he found himself unable to keep.

CHAPTER XI.

A WRITTEN PROPOSAL.

‘DEVILLED kidneys, actually,’ said Sir Ranald, in high good-humour, next morning at breakfast. ‘I thought the anatomy of our butcher’s shop seemed never to include kidneys.’

Alison was officiating at the tea-board in her plain but pretty morning-dress, and was thinking smilingly of the *tête-à-tête* in the twilighted garden the evening before, when Archie laid some letters before her father, who glanced at them nervously. All that were in blue envelopes he knew instinctively to be duns, and thrust aside unopened. One in a square cover, that had

thereon the initial C. surmounted by a coronet, he knew to be from Lord Cadbury, and opened, and read more than once, with a pleased, yet perplexed face, his brows knitted, yet his lips and eyes smiling.

‘From Lord Cadbury, is it, papa?’ asked Alison, after a pause.

‘Yes, and concerns you.’

‘Me?’

‘Intimately.’

‘In what way—how?’ she asked, with a heart that sank with apprehension.

‘By making a formal proposal through me.’

‘For what?’

‘Can you ask, child? Your hand.’

‘Oh, papa, nonsense?’ exclaimed Alison, growing very pale nevertheless, but in the desperation of her heart resolved to treat the matter with a certain degree of levity, as if too ridiculous for consideration.

The truth was that, with all the confi-

dence given him by his wealth and position, and all the coolness acquired by many past but coarse intrigues, he had not the courage to propose personally to a girl like Alison Cheyne, but did so thus, through her father, whose selfishness and impecuniosity made him, as he was well aware, an ally.

‘He writes very humbly and modestly for a man of such wealth and weight in the country,’ said Sir Ranald. ‘Do you wish to see his letter?’

‘No, papa, I have no interest in the matter,’ replied Alison, faintly.

“‘She has always permitted me to take the place of a friend—better than I merited,” he writes, “but that has been from the innate goodness of her heart, on which I know that I have no right to found the expectations that have drawn forth this letter.” Very well expressed indeed,’ added Sir Ranald, eyeing the missive through his *pince-nez*, ‘and he winds

up so nicely about your beauty and the wealth he can lay at your feet, and so forth.'

'And so, papa, I am to deem my face my fortune?' said Alison, still endeavouring to make light of the matter.

'Not alone.'

'What more is there, then?'

'You are a Cheyne of Essilmont.'

'How ridiculous of this man, who is old enough to be my father! And so, papa, this is my first proposal?'

'Your first, how many do you expect—you a penniless lass?'

'With a long pedigree.'

'Yes,' replied her father, with growing irritation, 'how many do you expect of any kind, as society goes now-a-days? Consider this well—or why consider at all?—but accept his offer for your own sake and mine.'

'But without love, papa?' said the girl, softly.

'You can't live on that, like the æsthetic

bride in *Punch*, on her teapot,' exclaimed Sir Ranald. 'In asking you to marry him, I rather ask you to marry his house in Belgravia, his place here in Hampshire, his equipages, and family jewels, as I suppose he calls them.'

'Oh, papa' said Alison, proudly and reproachfully, 'is it you, Cheyne of Essilmont, who suggest this to me?'

'Yes—I, Cheyne of Essilmont and that ilk—the bankrupt and the beggar,' he replied, with a burst of impressible bitterness.

'Papa, how can you, so proud of race, go in for vulgar mammon worship so unblushingly?'

'My poverty, but not my will, consents.'

'I thought daughters were sold only in Circassia.'

'Not at all, they sell too in Tyburnia and Belgravia to the highest bidder, and surely with all he can give you, all that he can surround us with, you might be able to tolerate him as a husband.'

But Alison could only think of Bevil Goring, and interlaced her fingers tightly beneath the tablecloth.

‘There is nothing in this world like riches,’ exclaimed Sir Ranald, glancing at the unopened blue envelopes, and tightening the silk cords of his sorely frayed dressing-gown. ‘What riches give us let us first inquire.’

‘Meat, fire, and clothes. What more? Meat, clothes, and fire,’ said Alison, with a sickly smile.

‘Alison—Miss Cheyne,’ said her father, with increasing asperity. ‘This offer of marriage is a serious matter, and not to be dismissed thus, by a quip or apt quotation.’

‘You admit that it is *apt*?’

‘I admit nothing—save that Cadbury has talked this matter over with me before.’

‘I suspected as much,’ said Alison, bitterly.

‘Thus, if you marry him, I know that besides making noble settlements upon you he will—by a scrape of his pen—clear off

nearly all the fatal encumbrances on our Scottish property; and I shall die, in old age—as I lived till ruin overtook me—Cheyne of Essilmont and that ilk.’

‘And when you die, papa—’ Alison began, in a broken voice.

‘The estate becomes yours and his—it is all one.’

(‘And I have promised to wait for Bevil!’ thought the girl in her heart.)

‘In the hope that you might yet learn to love him—indeed upon the faith that you would do so yet’—said Sir Ranald, after a pause, ‘he has made me, kindly and generously, heavy advances, which I have lost unwisely, and am totally unable to repay. How then am I to act? I can but look to you to listen to him patiently and, with some consideration for *me*, if he speaks of his love to you again, Alison.’

To the latter it seemed that it was always himself, not her, that he considered in this proposed matrimonial bargain.

The old man was very white ; his thin lips were tremulous with earnestness ; his china-blue eyes lowered beneath the glance of his daughter, and his naturally proud heart was wrung with pain at the admissions he was making.

She remained silent.

‘You can have no previous—no secret attachment, Alison?’ said Sir Ranald, after another pause.

The existence of one dearer to her than her own life was ignored in this question.

What was she to reply ? but reply she must, as he was eyeing her keenly, and even suspiciously.

‘Do not be angry with me, dearest papa, but Lord Cadbury I never, never could learn to love,’ she urged.

‘And what about this fellow Goring?’ he exclaimed, sternly, as he thought suddenly of many presents of flowers and music, with *Punch’s* and *Graphics*, &c.

‘Goring,’ she repeated, growing deadly pale, even to the lips.

‘It cannot be that you are capable of such infernal folly and tomfoolery as to be wasting a thought on *him*?’

‘He is different indeed,’ said Alison, almost with anger, but added, ‘believe me, papa, the man I love most in the world is yourself;’ and she nestled her sweet face in his neck as she spoke.

‘I have had my suspicions of Captain Goring for some time past; an empty-headed military dandy—handsome, I admit, but too handsome to have much in him,’ resumed Sir Ranald, angrily—‘a dangler, a detrimental, who, I have no doubt, in weak recommendation of himself could say, like the man in the play, “I have not much money, but what I have I spend upon myself.”’

‘Oh, papa!’ exclaimed Alison, who was blushing deeply now.

‘Pardon me if I wrong you, child,’ said Sir Ranald; ‘but in this most serious matter of your whole future life I cannot, and must not, be crossed.’

Alison felt her heart sinking, for, after this pointed and sharp allusion to Bevil Goring, it was pretty plain that his visits to Chilcote, though supposed to be casual ones at stated intervals, would have to cease.

Sir Ranald had waited for change of fortune, for something to turn up, year after year, as old Indian officers used to wait for the Deccan prize money, as a means of liquidating accumulated debt—means that never came; and now Cadbury’s offer had come to hand like a trump card in the game with Fortune!

‘I cannot live for ever, Alison, think of that,’ said he, after a long silence.

Alison had thought of it, and loving, yea, adoring her father as she did, the fear that she should one day surely lose him made

her heart shrink up and seem to die within her.

She would be alone—most terribly alone in this bleak world—when that event came to pass; and she recalled the cruel words of Lord Cadbury, that ‘he could not live for ever,’ with peculiar bitterness now. To whom, then, could she cling if not to Bevil Goring?

‘Shall I write to Cadbury that you say “Yes,” Alison?’

There were great, hopeless tears standing in her dark blue eyes, her quivering lips were tightly pressed together, and her slender white fingers were tightly interlaced, as she replied—

‘Papa, I would rather die first!’

‘And this is your irrevocable answer?’

‘It is.’

Two days passed now—days of unspeakable misery to Alison, before whom her father again and again set all his monetary

troubles, his present misery, and too probable future ruin, till her heart was wrung and her soul tortured within her by a conviction of her own selfishness in not making a sacrifice of herself and Bevil Goring; but her love of the latter on the one hand, and her horror and repugnance of Lord Cadbury on the other, prevailed, and Sir Randal found that he could neither lure nor bend her to their purpose.

After this he wrote a letter to Cadbury full of expressions of gratitude for the honour done himself and his daughter (he snorted when he wrote the word 'honour'), and with hopes that the latter would yet see the folly of delay—(it was, he felt assured, only a little delay, she would no doubt give her acceptance). He felt himself too deeply in Cadbury's debt even to hint that she had refused to consider his proposal of marriage in any way but one—with dismay and aversion.

Lord Cadbury, however, saw precisely

how the matter stood, for rumours of the meetings at the beeches had reached him, and he viciously tugged his long, white, horse-shoe-like mustaches.

Then he tore Sir Ranald's letter into minute fragments, and with an expression of anger—even of malignancy—in his cunning eyes, prepared to take the first train to town, muttering the while—

‘We shall see, my pretty Alison—we shall see!’

CHAPTER XII.

IN ST. CLEMENT'S LANE.

IT was the early dusk of a dull November day—a day in which there had not been even twilight in London—such days as are only to be seen there and in Archangel—when one of those awful black fogs prevail, when gas is lighted everywhere, when all wheel traffic is suspended, when cabs, 'buses, and drays cease to run, and sounds become curiously deadened or muffled.

Lord Cadbury, from narrow Lombard Street, turned into that narrower alley which lies between it and King William Street called St. Clement's Lane, from the ancient church dedicated to that saint some time

prior to 1309, and for the rebuilding of which, after the great fire, the parish bestowed upon Sir Christopher Wren the curious fee of 'one-third of a hogshead of wine.'

Here now are the close, narrow, and in many instances mean and sordid-looking offices of merchants, insurance agents, bill-brokers, and others, who, however, turn over vast sums of money in their humble-looking premises.

To this curious quarter of the City Lord Cadbury had come, with his thoughts intent—strange to say—upon Alison Cheyne!

The girl's great loveliness and purity had fired his passion—pure love it was not, nor could it be—and a sentiment of jealousy, pique, and more than either—something of revenge—made him resolve, through her father's means, to bend, to bow, to crush her to the end he wished!

At his years he was more than ever exasperated by the thought of having a

young and handsome rival like Bevil Goring to contend with ; and much jealousy had thus made the elderly lover mad with spite and reckless of consequences ; and as he knew that poverty and shame made Sir Ranald desperate he resolved to take his measures accordingly.

The longing to break her pride and to triumph over Goring made Cadbury meanly revengeful, and thus it was that on the day in question he went groping towards the office of Mr. Solomon Slagg, a bill discounter in this gloomy locality.

A narrow passage, closed by a green baize-covered swing door, led to a room, or rather den, in which a couple of clerks sat all day long, and often far into the night, perched on two high stools, writing in the same dreary ledgers by gaslight, for the blessed rays of the sun never found entrance there all the year round ; and in a smaller den beyond, usually lighted, but dimly, by a curious arrangement of reflectors, sat Mr.

Solomon Slagg, writing by the light of a single gas jet, minus shade or glass, but encircled by a wire guard.

The dingy room—the walls, ceiling, and bare floor were all of the same neutral kind of grey tint—had a little fire-place, wherein stood a meagre gas-stove. Above it on shelves were numerous mysterious-looking bottles containing samples of wine, and against the wall were numerous oil-paintings, placed there, not for ornament, but with reference to Mr. Slagg's multifarious modes of doing business and 'doing' the public.

His rather rotund but misshapen figure was wedged deep in a black leathern easy-chair at an ink-spotted desk, whereon lay piles of battered and greasy-looking ledgers and day-books. His bald head was sunk between his heavily-rounded shoulders; he had large, coarse ears, a nose like an inverted pear, pendulous cheeks, to which straggling grey whiskers were attached, and he

had cunning little eyes that twinkled in deep and cavernous sockets.

Altogether Mr. Solomon Slagg was not a pleasant person to look upon, but his face, such as it was, lighted up when he saw his visitor, to whom he bowed low, without rising, and to whom he indicated a chair by a wave of his pen, with which he made a mark or sum total on a page, and, closing a small ledger, turned to Lord Cadbury.

‘Stifling den this of yours,’ grumbled the latter, as he lighted a cigar; ‘no objections to smoking, I suppose?’

‘None, my lord.’

‘A vile day of fog—utter black fog. Had the devil’s own trouble in making you out on foot from Moorgate Street Station; but, you got my letter, of course?’

‘Yes, my lord.’

‘And acted upon it?’

‘Yes, my lord,’ said Slagg, slowly, ‘I was just about to write——’

‘That you had got up all Cheyne’s blue paper.’

‘Yes, in obedience to your directions, I took up all the acceptances I could trace, and, as he has been more than once in the Black List, I wonder that he has been able to draw bills without some one to back them. There is some of his paper,’ added Slagg, pointing to some very crumpled-looking slips.

‘Renewed more than once apparently.’

‘Oh! yes—again and again, in some instances.’

‘Poor old devil!’ said my Lord Cadbury, with reference to his prospective father-in-law; ‘what is the “demmed total,” as Mr. Mantilini would say?’

‘About a couple of thousand.’

Cadbury smiled—the sum was a trifle to him; but its demand meant utter ruin to the impecunious Sir Ranald, who could no more meet his acceptances than fly.

‘My pretty Alison will find that at Chilcote she has been living in a kind of fool’s paradise,’ thought he, as he tugged his long

white moustache with very great complacency.

‘You will put all the pressure you can upon Sir Ranald when these bills fall due—no more renewals at any risk ; at the same time it must all appear as your affair, not mine—my name must not appear in the matter.’

‘Of course not, my lord ; if it did——’

‘Don’t even think of it, for in that case it would prove my ruin in a quarter where I wish to be well thought of.’

‘Sir Ranald Cheyne seems to have been anticipating his income.’

‘Till, I suppose, there is nothing more to anticipate.’

‘Exactly.’

‘Good—good !’ exclaimed Cadbury, as he struck his gloved hands together ; ‘then you’ll put the screw on him the moment you can do so.’

‘Before this week is out, my lord. There is one acceptance there for £300 on which

the three days of grace are yet to run, and then I shall act upon the whole. Your lordship gave me *carte blanche* to acquire all these documents, and, having done so, your money must be repaid to you through me.'

'Precisely so.'

The two shook hands, and again Cadbury dived into the choking fog, to make his way westward to his club as best he might, feeling assured that an unexpected pressure would now be put upon the luckless Alison, by means of her father's mental misery and inordinate pride.

He knew how intense was the girl's devotion to the old man; he knew also that the latter, with all his love for his daughter, was not without a considerable spice of gross selfishness in his nature; that he loved the good things of this life very much, all the more that many were gone, and more might go, utterly beyond his reach, unless some one interposed to save him; and so Cadbury chuckled as he thought of the fatal

ball he had set in motion with the aid of Mr. Solomon Slagg.

And that evening, when in the brilliantly lighted dining-room of his magnificent and luxurious club in Pall Mall, after a sybarite repast, with many curious and elaborate *entrées*, he drank his Clicquot Veuve and Schloss Johannisberg, not an atom of compunction occurred to him for the misery he was working the poor but proud old baronet, and the sweet girl, whom, *bon gré mal gré*, he had resolved to make his wife.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ENIGMA.

DESPITE the silent vow he had made, Captain Dalton could not keep away from Laura Trelawney, the only woman the world seemed to hold for him, and yet whom he had no hope of winning.

His was no lovesick boy's fancy, yet it made him sallow, pale, and worn-looking, restless in solitude, and taciturn in society, always seeking for action, not for any tangible result that action gave, but as a means of present distraction.

The baffled Jerry Wilmot was not slow, at mess and elsewhere, to note the change in the generally quiet and even tenor of his

brother officer's general mood, and drew his own conclusions therefrom, and these were that he was not progressing favourably in his suit with the brilliant young widow.

'If a widow she really is,' said Jerry one day after evening parade, when Dalton's groom brought his horse round to the mess hut, and he was about to ride over to Chilcote Grange.

'How—what the devil do you mean, Jerry?' asked Dalton, greatly ruffled.

'Only that a rumour is abroad that has in it a deuced unpleasant sound.'

'To what effect?'

'That her husband is not dead—that she is not a widow at all—that he ran away from her, or something of that kind. Have you not remarked how she sneers at matrimony? Egad, I hope she is not *divorcée*!'

'Nonsense, Jerry; how dare you let your tongue run on thus!'

'Little birds sing strange songs sometimes.'

‘Sour grapes, Jerry, that is all,’ replied Dalton, laughing, but only from the teeth outwards, as he rode off to what Wilmot said was ‘his doom.’

The rumour—real or alleged—so casually mentioned by Jerry, rankled deeply in Dalton’s mind for a time, but it passed away when he found himself in the presence of Mrs. Trelawney, and he saw again her soft hazel eyes, so delicately lidded, their long lashes and eyebrows darker than her rich chestnut hair; her dress that hung in clinging folds around her and showed her beautiful form, grandly outlined as that of a classical statue; and when Antoinette—or Netty, as he called her now—stole her hand, white as a snowflake and tiny as a fairy’s, into his, and, looking at him with eyes blue as forget-me-nots, said, ‘I love you!’ he stroked the shower of golden tresses that were held back from the child’s brow by a blue silk riband, and replied, while he kissed her,

‘And I love you, Netty, so much!’

Her tiny mouth was all a-tremble with fun and pleasure as she asked—

‘And don’t you love mamma too?’

He made no answer, but Mrs. Trelawney, whose eyes had been suffused with tender pleasure at his kind manner with Netty, now laughed and said—

‘What do you mean, you *enfant terrible*?’

‘I heard you and Alison Cheyne talking of Captain Dalton the other day, and I thought I should so like him for a papa.’

‘Why?’ asked Mrs. Trelawney.

‘Because I never had one.’

‘Never had one?’ she repeated, laughing.

‘No; I am the only little girl that never had.’

‘You don’t remember him then?’ said Dalton, recalling the remarks of Jerry.

‘How can one remember what one never, never had?’ said little Netty, sententiously.

‘Go to your nurse, Netty,’ said her mamma, ‘I hear her calling for you.’

So Netty was summarily dismissed, and not a moment too soon, as both her listeners thought, and an awkward pause was about to ensue, when Mrs. Trelawney said, suddenly,

‘Your friend Goring seems desperately smitten with my sweet little friend Alison Cheyne.’

‘If so, I wish him all success,’ replied Dalton. ‘Goring is the king of good fellows, and the girl is quite beautiful.’

‘The French have a curious saying that it is not necessary to be beautiful in order to be a beauty ; but Alison Cheyne is indeed lovely, and has, in a high degree, a lady-like dignity about her ; and, with it, is so charmingly simple and *piquante*. I hope Goring is rich ; her father, I am pretty sure, looks forward to a wealthy alliance for her.’

‘Then, in that case, I fear poor Bevil

will be out of the running,' said Dalton ; 'he has some expectations, I know, but they are very remote, I fear. We cannot, however, control our hearts, nor, when in love, do we care about calculating eventualities,' he added, very pointedly, while taking Mrs. Trelawney's delicate and shapely little hand between his two, but she withdrew it, and, while discharging a whole volley of expression by one flashing *œillade* of her hazel eyes, she exclaimed, laughingly,

'Take care, Captain Dalton, or I shall be led to infer that you are falling in love with *me*.'

'You know that I have done so—that I have loved you since the first moment we met.'

She was laughing excessively now, and Dalton felt that a lover laughed at had little hope of success, so he said, gravely,

'I hope you are not playing fast and loose with me and my friend Wilmot.'

‘Have you no better opinion of me, Captain Dalton?’

‘He gave me to understand that you declined his addresses.’

‘Whatever they may be—yes,’ replied the smiling widow, ‘but I would not have mentioned the matter, as he seems to have done—poor Jerry!’

‘Why mock my earnestness?’ asked Dalton, in a pointed tone of voice.

‘Because you cannot love me as I would wish to be loved.’

‘You do not know me, Mrs. Trelawney.’

‘I know you better than you know yourself!’ she exclaimed, looking him full in the face with a peculiar expression that puzzled him, while her smiles vanished.

‘Perhaps you do,’ said he, ‘but I think that, if you once loved a man, that love would end only with your life.’

She regarded him for a moment with an almost disdainful smile, and said,

‘And you, Captain Dalton—if you loved a woman, how long would your love last? Only while it suited your fancy or convenience.’

‘You are very severe with me,’ he observed, with some surprise at her taunting manner.

‘Not more than you know you deserve.’

At these words Dalton visibly changed colour, and became confused. To what secret of his past life was she referring, he thought; to what long-buried thoughts was she finding a clue?

‘You have become very silent,’ said she.

He sighed deeply, and rose as if to depart.

‘Pardon me, if my words pain you, Captain Dalton,’ said she, all her spirit of raillery gone; ‘but you have grown pale, as if the shadow of death were on you.’

‘It is not that,’ said he, with a sickly smile.

‘What then?’

‘The shadow of a life rather.’

‘Whose?’ she asked, lightly touching his hand.

‘My own!’

‘He *has* a secret that shall one day be mine!’ thought Mrs. Trelawney, while at the same moment Dalton was thinking of the rumour mentioned by Jerry Wilmot, and marvelled if her occasional peculiarity of manner arose from that rumour being founded on truth!

But Dalton felt his heart too much involved, and himself too deeply committed to let the matter end here.

‘Your treatment of me is most strange, Mrs. Trelawney, even cruel, I think, Laura—permit me to call you so—even for once,’ he said. ‘My society has always seemed to give you pleasure, and you have always seemed glad when I caressed your little daughter and gave her little presents; and, truth to tell, dearest Laura, my heart has somehow gone out to that child as if she were my own.’

‘Your own—yours!’ exclaimed Mrs. Trelawney, as she pressed a hand upon her heart, and lowered her eyelids, as if to hide the expression of joy, exultation, and, odd to say, irritation that mingled in her face.

He trembled violently, as if struggling with his love of her, and something mental seemed for a minute to load or fetter his tongue till he said, in a low voice,

‘If I can prove that I have the right to ask you, will you marry me—will you be my wife, Laura?’

‘Do not ask me,’ she replied, trembling in turn.

‘Why—why?’ he asked, impetuously.

‘Are you aware how strangely you *prelude* your proposal by referring to some eventuality, Captain Dalton?’ said she, with some hauteur; ‘but be assured that I can never be *more* to you than I am *now*, were I to live a hundred years.’

‘And so you are but a cruel coquette

after all,' said Dalton, recovering himself; 'one who has fooled me—a man of the world, as I deemed myself—to the top of my bent, only to throw me over at last. Well, perhaps I am rightly served,' he added, bitterly.

'You *are* rightly served, Captain Dalton,' said she, laughing once more.

'What do you know—what do you mean?'

'What your own heart tells you; but here is a visitor, Bella Chevenix; let us at least part friends.'

'Mere friends we can never be,' said he, sadly.

'As you please, Captain Dalton; but be assured we have not seen the last of each other yet,' she replied, with one of her most brilliant and coquettish smiles, as he bowed himself out; and so ended an interview which both felt had included the most *singular* bit of love-making they had ever been involved in.

‘By Jove, she is an enigma,’ muttered Dalton; but she had no such thought of *him*.

CHAPTER XIV.

‘SOMETHING IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN!’

‘CAPTAIN GORING, let it be distinctly understood that from this day forward your visits to Chilcote cease, and let all this be forgotten,’ were the words with which Sir Ranald accosted Goring one forenoon.

‘Forgotten!’ exclaimed the latter, rising from his seat, hat in hand.

Sir Ranald had suddenly come in and found him seated with Alison, paying one of his usual visits, as Goring wished them to be thought, and the old man was greatly ruffled, even exasperated.

‘As for my daughter, sir, I forbid her to

speak to you again, to recognise you anywhere, to mention your name, or even think of you!’ he continued, with increasing vehemence, lashing himself to fresh anger with the sound of his own words. ‘D—n it, sir, in my younger days the pistol would have put an effectual stop to your uncalled-for interloping.’

‘Or yours, and your coldness of heart,’ replied Goring, who was so confounded by this sudden outburst of wrath as scarcely to know what he said.

He was naturally a proud-spirited young fellow, and rather prompt to ire. He blushed scarlet to the temples at these most affronting speeches; but they gave him double pain when he saw the wan, blanched, and imploring face of poor Alison, whose heart was wrung by the words and bearing of her father—a bearing all so unlike his own usually cold, stately, and aristocratic self.

At that moment she felt a sort of sicken-

ing conviction that all was over between her and Bevil, as if she was being torn from him for ever; and, indeed, separation now was nearer than either of them suspected, for cruel events were fated to follow each other fast.

Goring bowed to father and daughter, just touching the hand of the latter as he withdrew. Sir Ranald turned his back upon him and looked through a window; thus Alison had an opportunity to whisper, 'The beeches at eight this evening,' and Bevil left Chilcote with his heart swelling with anger, and smarting under a keen sense of insult and regret.

'Oh, papa, can you forget that he saw Ellon laid in his grave?' she was on the point of saying, while choked with tears, when she suddenly remembered that Ellon's ring was now on Goring's finger, and that the latter's engagement ring was on the third finger of her left hand, where her father, in his abstraction, selfishness, and

pre-occupation with monetary affairs, had never even once detected it.

And now, truth to tell, though desperate with poverty, the struggle to keep up appearances, and anger to find his purposes crossed, the old man blushed for himself in having so far forgot what was due to a visitor, a guest, and one gentleman to another, but that emotion was not unmixed with one of satisfaction that 'the affair,' as he thought it, 'between Alison and that fellow was over now and for ever.'

On this day Alison could not dissemble; she cared not to hide her emotion from him, and let the tears of shame and sorrow pour hotly and bitterly down her cheeks, while he looked grimly on, thinking it would 'be all right by-and-by.'

If she were to see Bevil no more, was the girl's constant thought—what would become of her?

The hours in which he had no part lagged fearfully with Alison, and to Bevil, when

they met, the minutes seemed to be literally winged. Her whole life had lately been divided into two portions, one when she was briefly with Bevil, and the other when she was *not*. Their meetings had become necessary, as it would seem, to their very existence, and, were these ended, both would find their 'occupation gone.'

They knew not how they got through their days before they loved each other, and had those delicious stolen meetings to look forward to and look back to, as something sweet, new, and beloved, to con and dream over.

Till the advent of Bevil Goring, how drearily dull her life seemed to have been at Chilcote! It was all very well to cull and arrange bouquets with all an artist's eye to colour and form, to warble the old songs her mother had taught in brighter days at Essilmont and elsewhere, with all that sweetness which she inherited from her, and vary these occupations by atten-

dance on her fowls and other pets, hunting with old Archie for the eggs when the hens had taken to laying under the hedges ; turning dresses, cleaning her own gloves, and, while longing for the purse of Fortunatus, striving to make sixpence go as far as a shilling, feeling that darning and mending were her purgatory, and economy the bane of her existence ; but into that existence, with the love of Bevil Goring, there had come a ray of brightest sunshine, with a new and hitherto unknown sense of happiness. But, alas ! it would seem they were now to be followed by sorrow, and the gloom of a hopeless night which would have no end.

As the afternoon and evening stole on, Alison's heart beat wildly and anxiously for the time of her meeting—too probably the last one—with Bevil, and after a frugal dinner of cold mutton and boiled rice (a *menu* at which her father made more than one grimace), with old Archie Auchindoir in attendance, solemnly and respectfully, as

if it had been some banquet suited to Lucullus, when Sir Ranald began to doze over his bottle of carefully-aired St. Peray 'Hermitage'—most probably the last he possessed—Alison rose softly from the table and stole into the entrance hall, where the hands on the clock dial indicated that the hour was nearly eight.

She assumed the hat and shawl she usually wore when in the garden, and passing through the latter, in her resolution to meet Bevil, almost heedless if her father missed her, she was about to open the gate that led to the beech avenue, when she was startled—rooted to the spot for a moment—by seeing, or fancying she saw, before her, amid the dark and uncertain shadows of the November evening, the blacker outline of a dog—of a hound before her.

At this conviction a gasping cry escaped her, and a sense of suffocation came into her slender throat; inspired by a courage beyond what she deemed she possessed, she

darted forward, but the outline seemed to melt away before her or elude her eyes. No dog was there, nor could there have been, for no dog of mortal mould could have cleared that lofty wall, and no sound followed the disappearance.

All was still save the drip of the dew as it fell from the overladen leaf of an evergreen.

Alison felt her heart beating painfully, while a deadly chill seemed to settle upon it. Had the family boding of evil been before her? Oh, no, no—impossible. And yet it was said that when Ellon and her mother died—— She tried to thrust the thought away.

It must have been, she said to herself, some peculiar arrangement of light and shadow—some shadow formed in the starlight and thrown on the grass; for often as she heard of that Dog of Doom—the Spectre Hound of Essilmont—she always shrank from believing in its existence, but her heart

was filled with vague and undefinable apprehension nevertheless.

There was a step on the gravel, a figure appeared in the shade of the star-lighted avenue, and in another moment she was sobbing heavily in Bevil's arms.

Her excessive agitation he attributed, naturally, to the very unpleasant scene of the forenoon, especially when she said,

‘Oh! Bevil, how, or in what terms, am I to apologise to you for the mode in which papa treated you to-day?’

‘Poor old gentleman, I can pardon all his petulance, but it fills me with a fear that he designs you to be the wife of another. Curse upon this poverty of mine, which mars as yet the life of us both, Alison. I have done wrong in loving you and winning you without your father's permission; but he never would have accorded it.’

‘Oh!’ moaned Alison, with her cheek on his breast; ‘something is about to happen—something terrible about to befall us!’

‘Something, darling—what?’

‘Death, or a calamity little short of it, perhaps.’

‘I do not understand you,’ said Bevil, caressing her with great tenderness, and becoming very anxious on finding how faint her voice was, and how excessively she was trembling. ‘Dearest Alison, the night air is chill, I am selfish and barbarous in keeping you here.’

‘Don’t say so, my love,’ murmured the girl, as she nestled close to him, ‘for something is about to happen, and heaven knows only when I may meet you again.’

‘What fills you so with apprehension?’

And now, with pale and trembling lips, while reclining in Goring’s arms, she told him the family legend, at which he—a man of the period—a young officer within a mile or so of his lines at Aldershot, felt inclined to laugh very heartily, but for Alison’s intense dejection, and the doubts and fears incident to their mutual position.

‘Dearest Alison,’ said he, smiling, ‘you have one *bête noire* assuredly—old Cadbury—don’t, for heaven’s sake, manufacture and adopt another.’

‘Bevil, don’t jest with me,’ she said, imploringly.

‘I do not jest with you, sweet one; but tell me all about this devilish hound—for such it must be, of course.’

It would seem that it first appeared on the night of a dreadful storm, centuries ago—a night when the wind howled and roared round Essilmont, and the Ythan, white and foaming, tore in full flood through the dreary heather glens towards the sea, and when the thunder peals seemed to rend heaven; yet amid all this elemental din the gate-ward at Essilmont heard the baying of a dog at the gate, and, opening it, a large black hound came in, and was permitted to crouch by the hall fire, and when the embers of the latter began to sink and fade away, it was remarked by those who were

there that the eyes of the great shaggy hound, as it lay with its long sharp nose resting on its outstretched paws, had in them a strangely diabolical and malicious glitter as they roved from face to face.

‘I dislike the aspect of this brute,’ said the Laird to the Lady of Essilmont, and as he spoke the hound began to lash the floor with his tail. ‘Let him be driven forth.’

‘I pray you not,’ said she. ‘The poor animal may have lost its master.’

On this the hound, as if grateful to her, licked her white hand with his red tongue, and she stroked him tenderly. She was Annot Udney, a daughter of the Laird of Auchterellon, and reputed as a witch, and the possessor of a remarkable magic crystal ball, with which she could work good or evil, but the latter most frequently.

‘Annot, its aspect chills me,’ said the laird again.

‘Chills *you*, Ranald?’ exclaimed the lady.

‘ You whose spear was foremost in the fray last week at the Red Harlaw.’

‘ Yes—I shudder, and know not why,’ he replied, and signed himself with the cross, on which the hound instantly snarled, and showed all his white glistening teeth, while his eyes glared like red and fiery carbuncles.

No more was wanting now to prove to Ranald Cheyne that the animal was a thing of evil, so snatching up a halbert he was about to cleave his head when the lady interposed with outstretched arms and a cry of dismay. She was a woman of rare beauty and great sweetness of manner, notwithstanding her evil repute; so she stayed her husband’s arm, and said,

‘ Let me put forth the hound.’

‘ You, Annot?’

‘ Yes—I,’ she replied; and patting the dog’s rough head it rose and followed her to the outer gate, and now the wild storm which shook the walls some time before was

over ; it seemed to have spent its fury and passed away.

A little time elapsed ; Annot Cheyne did not return : the laird became anxious and impatient, and as all the household were now abed he followed her.

The sky was cloudless now, and the white moonlight fell aslant in silvery sheets over the barbican wall, and in the flood of it that streamed through the outer archway he saw his wife caressing the gigantic hound.

‘Annot!’ cried he, impatiently. She made no answer, but stooped and again caressed the dog.

At that moment a dark cloud passed suddenly and quickly over the face of the moon, involving the archway in blackness and obscurity ; and the baying of the hound was heard, but, as it seemed, at a vast distance.

When, a minute after, the moon emerged from its shadow, the radiance streamed through the archway as before ; but

there was no one visible—the lady and the hound had disappeared !

‘She was never seen again,’ said Alison in conclusion ; ‘but as for the hound, that came and went with the tempest, it has appeared, or has been said to have done so, when—when evil was near the Cheynes of Eßsilmont ; and, whether the story of its appearance was fable or fancy, the evil certainly came in some fashion or other.’

‘It is the offspring of vulgar superstition or fevered fancy. How can you think of old-world Scotch nonsense in this age, Alison ?’ said Bevil Goring.

‘If a boding of evil it is, I hope it menaces me, and not poor papa,’ said Alison, down whose cheeks the unseen tears were streaming in the dark, ‘and as for Lord Cadbury——’

‘Don’t speak about him—don’t think about him !’ interrupted Bevil, impatiently. ‘And yet,’ he added, ‘if this old fellow loves you, I do not wonder at it.’

‘Why?’

‘Because all men who know you must love you, though I hope it is to be your destiny, your strength, to love but one. Yet, Alison, what agony it must be to love you as I do, and only to lose you after all.’

This unfortunate speech, though meant to be a loving compliment by Goring, seemed but the echo of the forebodings that were in the heart of Alison, and she wept heavily while he strained her to his breast and kissed her, not once but many times, and she hung or lay passive in his embrace like a dead weight, while the hearts of both were full of a kind of passionate despair—their future seemed so much without hope—their present menaced by so much turmoil and opposition.

‘My darling, my darling,’ exclaimed Goring, when at last he released her, ‘whatever happens I shall never, never give you up.’

So they parted at last, to meet at their trysting place on the second day ensuing, and

Alison, as she hurried homeward, and passed amid the dark shadows of the star-lighted garden, looked fearfully round her with dilated eyes, while her spirit quailed in dread of seeing defined through the gloom what she saw, or thought she saw, before, and hastened into the house, closing the door softly, yet swiftly behind her, as if pursued by something unseen.

Duty detained Goring at the camp during the intervening day, but on the following, full of more lover-like anxiety than ever, with a hundred things to say, to ask, and to hear, hopes to suggest, and comforting speeches to make, he sought the beeches, and waited there till all hope died out.

Alison did not come; the day was cold; the wind bleak and keen as the very last of the damp brown leaves were swept away with it, and at last he turned aside with a heavy heart.

The next day and the next brought the same result. She failed to meet him, and

dismay filled his heart lest she might be ill. She was delicate and fragile, and the last night they met she was terribly shaken and excited by the untoward episode of the morning and her superstitious terror of the evening.

From the moment Bevil Goring met and knew Alison Cheyne, his heart had gone out of his own keeping, and never returned to it again. His love for her had become deep and intense, but, strange to say, did not seem a hopeful one, unless fortune changed suddenly with him. It was useless to expect it would do so with her family now.

His position was good ; his family name unimpeachable. He bore a high reputation in his regiment as a brave and well-trained officer, and one well used to command ; but his means were certainly not what he should ask a wife of Alison's culture to share, nor in any way were they equal to the ambition and dire necessities of the bankrupt baronet of Essilmont.

After some more days of agonising delay and anxiety, Goring resolved to proceed to Chilcote House, and endeavour to discover if aught ailed Alison, or how it was that she had ceased to come to their meeting-place as usual.

From the clustered and ivy-clad chimneys no smoke ascended against the grey November sky. Every window was shuttered and closed. There was an absence of all stir—an oppressive silence everywhere in and around the house—even from the little court where the clucking of Alison's hens was wont to be heard. A spade yet remained stuck in a plot of the garden, as if old silver-haired Archie Auchindoir had suddenly quitted his work there and returned no more.

Either by the result of mischief, or recent neglect, a large mass of the ivy and clematis that overhung the pretty little oaken porch had fallen down, and, if further evidence of total desertion were necessary, a large

white ticket on a pole announced in black letters that the 'commodious villa of Chilcote was to let, furnished or unfurnished. Communications to be made in writing to Mr. Solomon Slagg, St. Clement's Lane, City.'

On taking in all these details of a sudden, hasty, and perhaps disastrous departure, the heart of Bevil seemed to stand still for some seconds.

Where had the little household gone, and why? And why did not Alison write to him of her movements? though he could not have replied without compromising her. Was Sir Ranald dead? Was she? Oh, no! no! He must have heard it—friends in camp must have heard through the public prints of any catastrophe.

She was gone—carried off; he could not doubt it—but whither and to what end he could not even surmise; his bower of roses—his fool's paradise, was levelled in the dust at last, and he could but linger, and

look hopelessly and questioningly at the ticket of Mr. Solomon Slagg, and at the darkened windows through which Alison must often have looked, perhaps watching for his own approach.

He wrote to Mr. Slagg for information and Sir Ranald's address, but received no answer (doubtless Mr. Slagg was acting under the orders of Lord Cadbury), save printed circulars, from which it appeared that Mr. Slagg was ready to advance 'money confidentially to young officers and others on easy terms, borrowers' own security, repayments at convenience, &c., &c.'

It was terrible for Bevil Goring to surrender those hopes he had been cherishing in the depths of his heart—hopes that, though of recent growth, were strong, and dear, and precious, and the realisation of which had become his daily prayer.

A darkness as sudden seemed to have fallen upon him !

He remembered now all the poor girl's

painful forebodings on that last eventful night that *something was about to happen*—the surely absurd story about the spectre dog, which he had so affectionately derided; but now ‘something’ certainly *had* come to pass! And what was it?

CHAPTER XV.

EVIL TIDINGS.

‘I’M glad to see you back, Miss Cheyne,’ said Archie, as she met him in the passage or entrance-hall; ‘Sir Ranald has missed you sairly.’

‘Missed me? I left him asleep, Archie,’ exclaimed Alison.

‘Something wakened him wi’ a start, just as ye gaed into the garden.’

‘Something—what?’

‘A sound, I watna what,’ replied Archie, unwillingly, smoothing his silver hair with his hand, and looking round him stealthily.

‘What sound? I heard nothing in the garden.’

‘Weel, something like the baying o’ a hound.’

‘A *hound!*’ said Alison, faintly.

‘I dinna quite say sae; but say naething to Sir Ranald about it. Gang to him at aince; he’s got some unco news, I fear, by the evening post.’

Walking like an automaton, though very pale, and tremulous in heart and limb, Alison entered the dining-room, where she found her father walking up and down its entire length, with a letter crushed and crumpled in his thin white hand, which was nervously clenched upon it. His face was very pale; his lips were twitching, and drops of perspiration stood upon his brow.

‘Papa!’ exclaimed Alison, winding her soft arms round him; ‘what is the matter with you?’

‘It has come at last, child.’

‘What has come?’

‘The long-impending and utter ruin, unless—unless——’

‘What?’

‘You will save me; end my sorrows, and your own, by accepting Cadbury. You can lift from my heart and our family the shadow that has darkened them so long—the cold shadow of grinding poverty.’

Her lips became white and parched—so parched that she had to moisten them with her tongue, and even then she could not speak for a time. Bevil Goring’s kisses were fresh upon them, and now she had to listen to a death sentence like this!

Her first dread had been a reference to her absence at such a time, but, by the business in question, it was evident her ramble in the dusk was forgotten, or a very subordinate matter indeed.

‘A man named Slagg has written me,’ said Sir Ranald, in a low and faint voice, while leaning with one hand on the table and the other pressed on the region of the heart, ‘written me to the effect that all my recent and too often renewed acceptances

and promissory notes have come—how, I know not—into his possession, and that if I do not liquidate them forthwith everything we have—even to the chairs we sit on—will be seized, and myself too probably arrested, while you, Alison—you, my loved Ailie,’ he continued, with sudden pathos in his voice—‘will have neither house nor home!’

He was a proud man Sir Ranald Cheyne, and apart from the selfishness peculiar to many of his class—especially in Scotland—an honourable man. Thus it is but fair to infer that had he known or been aware in the least degree of the game Lord Cadbury was playing, and that the letter of Solomon Slagg was his trump card, he would rather have faced ruin and beggary than urged this odious marriage on his daughter.

The latter clasped her hands in silence and looked and felt like a hunted creature. Prior to this she had often thought over the means of escape, of working for her bread

—a mode of work of which she had very vague ideas indeed—but now she felt stunned and stupefied.

After all—after the dawn and noon of the sweet day that had stolen upon her—could she do nothing, if she was to serve her father, but to marry this vulgar lord ?

‘I have refused Lord Cadbury’s written proposal, papa,’ said she, in a voice so low that it sounded like a whisper.

‘He will renew it, and it is a brilliant offer, Alison. He will be kind to you—so kind, Alison—and you—you will not be so mad as to refuse him now. Think of his proffered settlements and of what we—what I owe him.’

‘Think of every one, of all—all but myself and my future !’ said Alison, with her slender fingers interlaced above her head and her eyes cast despairingly upward.

‘She is yielding,’ thought Sir Ranald ; ‘but I see how it is—this fellow Goring is in our way.’

Then he put his arm round her caressingly and said,

‘The sooner you become sensible, Alison, and forget your foolish—your most unwise fancy for that young fellow at Aldershot, the better for yourself and for—me.’

He never forgot *himself* with all his love for his daughter.

‘But, papa,’ she said, with pallid lips, ‘I love—Bevil.’

‘It has come to this—an engagement?’

‘Yes, papa, I cannot deceive you.’

‘An engagement—a secret one—without my knowledge; how dared you?’

‘I promised to wait for a year—he asked me only a year—and he loves me so much!’

‘No doubt,’ snarled Sir Ranald, through his set teeth. ‘People cannot live on love, however, and your friend “Bevil,” as you call him, cannot pay my debts.’

‘Oh, would that he could do so!’

‘Till recently you have always been accustomed to luxury and ease. These Cad-

bury lays at your feet, offering you—who by position and education are unfit to be a poor man's wife—absolute splendour.'

'But Bevil is not so poor as you think, and, moreover, may be richer in time,' urged Alison, piteously; 'he has prospects, expectations——'

'Of course—what sharper is without them?—and for the realization of these visions you would be waiting to the sacrifice of your youth, your beauty, and your poor old father's few remaining years.'

She wrung her white hands. She had often thought before of the tradesmen's unpaid bills—of her dresses made to do duty for a second season she had never thought at all; but now the letter of Slagg had filled her with vague and undefinable terror.

She could not, poor girl, understand the tenor of it altogether, but she knew it meant ruin, for she could read that in her father's anxious face; yet why should fate compel

her to marry Lord Cadbury?—she could work—work or die!

‘Loving Bevil as I do, papa, it would be very base of me to accept Lord Cadbury without even an atom of respect or gratitude,’ said she, gathering courage from her very despair, while her eyes streamed with tears.

‘I do not see that love has much to do with marriage, but know that money has a great deal,’ said her father, smoothing out the letter of Solomon Slagg for re-perusal. ‘Love is a luxury the poor can’t afford, and it is better to marry on a little of it, and find that little increase by residence together and force of habit, than marry on much, and find that much dwindling away into mutual toleration and cold indifference.’

Sir Ranald had not an atom of sympathy with or toleration for this love fancy, so he deemed it, of his daughter. His own lover-days and his marriage seemed to have come to pass so long ago as to have belonged to

some state of pre-existence. He could scarcely realise them now; yet he knew they must have been; Burke and Debrett told him so; and Alison was there as a living proof of both; but his love—if love it was—had been a well-ordered arrangement with a lady of good position and ample means, not with an obscure nobody.

‘Papa,’ said Alison, after a silence that had been broken only by her sighs and his own, ‘when urging me to do what you wish, have you no thought of the long line of the Cheynes of Essilmont, who lived there for so many centuries—who so often lost their lives in battle, but never honour, who never stained their name by any base or ignoble transaction, who lived and died so spotlessly?’

This little outburst was something precisely after his own heart; he patted Alison’s head of rich brown hair, and said, with a kindling in his eyes,

‘It is precisely because I *do* think of them

that I wish to see you wealthy and ennobled, raised out of this now sordid life of ours.'

'Ennobled by wedding the son of Timothy Titcomb, of Threadneedle Street!'

'If you will not save me by doing so, we have nothing left for it now but a disgraceful flight.'

'Flight?'

'Yes; I must quit this place ere I am arrested.'

'For where?'

'God alone knows.'

Alison interlaced her fingers again in mute misery.

'You look worn and weary, Alison,' said Sir Ranald, observing the pinched expression of her little white face.

'I am both, indeed!'

'Then go to bed, child; think over all I have urged, think of what is before us, think well, and give me a final answer in the morning.'

She kissed him with lips that were cold and quivering, and retired to her room, while he threw open his bureau, drew the lamp towards him, spread a sheet of paper with a vague idea that he was about to make some monetary calculations, and mechanically dipped a pen in the ink-bottle.

Then he threw it down, and, resting his aching head upon his delicate and wrinkled hands, sank into a kind of stupor of thought.

From this he was roused by a hand being laid gently on his shoulder, and by the voice of old Archie Auchindoir saying, while he shook his white head,

‘Puir Sir Ranald—oh! my dear maister; eild and poortith are sair burdens for æ back.’

‘What do you want, Archie?’ he asked, peevishly.

‘Sir Ranald, sir, I’ve a sma’ matter o’ three hunder pound and mair saved up in your service, and at your service it is now, every bodle o’d—tak’ it and welcome; it

may help ye at this pinch—tak' it, for God's sake, if it will tak' the tears frae Miss Alison's een.'

'Poor Archie, I thank you,' said Sir Ranald, shaking the hand of this faithful old man, whose eyes were inflamed with the tears he was, perhaps, too aged to shed; 'it is very generous of you, this offer, but is—pardon me saying so—simply absurd!'

Again and again Archie pressed the little sum in vain upon the acceptance of his master, till the pride of the latter turned his gratitude into something of his usual hauteur, on which Archie withdrew sorrowfully, muttering under his breath,

'Troth, he's weel boden there ben, that will neither borrow nor lend.'

Meaning that Sir Ranald must surely be well enough off, if he could afford to dispense with all assistance.

With her gorgeous brown hair unrolled and floating over her shoulders, Alison,

with her hands lying listlessly in her lap, sat lost in her own terrible thoughts, with her tear-inflamed eyes gazing into her bed-room fire, which had just attained that clear, red light, without flickering flame, in which one may fancy strange scenes without end—deep valleys, caverns, rocks, castles perched on cliffs, faces, and profiles; and therein had she seen, more than once, Essilmont with its Scoto-French turrets with their conical roofs and vanes, its crow-stepped gables and massive chimneys, that she now might never see in reality again!

A victim on the double altar of gold and filial piety.

How often had she read in novels and romances, and how often had she seen on the stage, the story of a heroine—a wretched girl placed in precisely the cruel predicament in which she now found herself, and deemed that such dramatic and doleful situations could only exist in the fancies of the author or of the playwright!

Without, the cold and wintry wind had torn away the last leaves from every tree long since; the last flowers were also long dead; the chill night rain pattered, with sleet and hail, upon the windows; and, like the heart of Alison, all nature seemed desolate and sad.

She shuddered when she heard the moaning of the wind, and thought of the Spectre Hound.

Could it be that she had indeed seen it?

CHAPTER XVI.

CADBURY'S PLAN OR PLOT.

AND now to relate what more came to pass at Chilcote, and where Alison had vanished to.

The morning came to her after a sleepless night, and she was incapable of giving the answer to which Sir Ranald had hopefully looked forward. She was in a species of mental fever. So passed the day—the day she knew that she could not meet Bevil—and the short winter evening was passing into another night, when the ringing of the door bell gave her a kind of electric shock, so thoroughly was her whole nervous system shaken.

The hour was a dark and gloomy one ; snow flakes were falling athwart the dreary landscape of leafless trees, and the north wind moaned sadly round old Chilcote and its giant beeches, with a wail that seemed consonant with disasters impending there, when Lord Cadbury arrived, by chance as it seemed, but in reality to see the effect of the bomb he had fired from the office of Mr. Solomon Slagg, in St. Clement's Lane.

The curtains had been drawn over the windows by the tiny little hands of Daisy Prune ; a coal fire blazed pleasantly in the grate, and threw a ruddy glow over all the panelled room and the family portraits, particularly on those of the two Cavalier brothers, looking so proud and defiant in their gorgeous costume, that ere long would be finding their way to the brokers in Wardour Street or elsewhere.

Sir Ranald and Alison sat alone—alone in their misery—when the peer came

jauntily in, and took in the whole situation at a glance—the poor girl, with all her rare beauty, looking utterly disconsolate; the bankrupt father, with all his pride, looking utterly desperate!

Alison was seated, or rather crouching, on a black bearskin rug by Sir Ranald's side—one arm caressingly thrown over his knees, and she was in the act of touching his wrinkled hand with hers with a fondness pretty to see, and then he stooped to take her face between them both and looked into her blue-grey eyes wistfully.

They formed a lovely picture, but it touched not the heart of my Lord Cadbury of Cadbury Court.

The bezique cards lay on the table close by, where old Archie had placed them as usual; but they were unnoticed now. Father and daughter were quite past playing their quiet game together.

Alison, as if the visitor's presence was to her insupportable, arose, and muttering some

excuse, she knew not what, withdrew to her own room.

In Sir Ranald's eyes there was a passionate and despairing expression of pain that wrung the very soul of Alison; but still, she thought, why should the love of her youth, and why should *her* whole future life be sacrificed for one who had enjoyed *his* long life to the full, and all because her grandfather had been, like her father, a spendthrift!

Cadbury took in the whole situation; all that he anticipated had come to pass; the result was exactly what he had foreseen, and he now hoped that he would be able to triumph over Alison, whose repugnance for him piqued his pride and excited his revenge.

'What is the matter, Cheyne—you look seriously unwell?' said he, with well-feigned interest.

'You find me a sorely broken man,' replied Sir Ranald, in a hollow voice, as he

took the hand of his visitor and begged him to be seated. 'Ruin has overtaken me at last, Cadbury.'

'I think I can guess,' said the latter, tugging at his long white moustaches; 'but tell me in what form.'

In a few words, but with intense shame and mortification of spirit, Sir Ranald told of Slagg's threatening letter, and of all that his listener had been aware of days before.

'And these acceptances must be met?'

'But how, Cadbury—how? I might as well attempt to make a river run up a hill.'

'What is before you?' asked the peer, a cunning smile twinkling in his eyes, unseen by his visitor.

'Death or disgrace!'

'Disgrace in what fashion?'

'Arrest or flight.'

Cadbury continued to pull each of his moustaches in a kind of nervous way, and after a minute's silence he said, with a kind of laugh,

‘I think I can help you.’

‘I am not a man who has been used to seek help from others,’ said Sir Ranald, with a little of his old pride of bearing.

Lord Cadbury coughed and smiled as he thought of more than one cheque given to the speaker, and by the latter apparently forgotten.

‘Under this terrible pressure, have you spoken of my proposal to—to Miss Cheyne?’ he asked, bluntly.

‘Yes.’

‘And with what result—for she knows what I can do, if I choose?’

‘None—none!’

‘Even to save you, she will not marry me?’

‘No.’

‘No!’

‘At least, I have totally failed to extract an answer from her.’

Lord Cadbury’s ferret-like eyes flashed;

he actually ground his teeth and clenched his coarse, vulgar hands.

‘Look here, Cheyne—if I take up your paper and pay Slagg, could you not force her—I say, force——’

‘Hush—she might fall ill and die, as her mother died, of a decline,’ groaned Sir Ranald.

‘Oh! not a bit, not a bit,’ said Cadbury; ‘but change of air will do her good. Let us get her out of this place, anyway.’

‘The fact is, she has a fancy for that infantry fellow, Bevil Goring, at Aldershot,’ said Sir Ranald, who carefully omitted to state that Alison had admitted her engagement.

‘The devil—but I don’t need to be told that,’ exclaimed Cadbury, angrily; ‘yet we must eradicate that fancy, and sharply too.’

‘But how?’

‘Take her over to the Continent. Let

us get her on board my yacht, with you as her protector, and all will come right in the end, and I'll leave *you* ashore somewhere when you least suspect it,' was Cadbury's concluding thought.

'But these bills that Slagg holds——'

'Are not in his possession now.'

'In whose, then?' asked Sir Ranald, with fresh alarm.

'In *mine*.'

'Yours?'

'Yes—look here.'

Cadbury opened his pocket-book and laid before the startled eyes of Sir Ranald eight or nine bills and promissory notes, all of which he knew but too well.

'How comes this pass?' he asked, with a bewildered air, as he passed a hand across his forehead.

'I know Solomon Slagg. I knew him to my cost ere I came to the title. You mentioned that he had acceptances of yours. I got them all up, and trust that in quietude

Alison will end this nonsense and become Lady Cadbury.'

Sir Ranald shook his head and sank back in his chair.

'If I put these papers in the fire, will you stick to my plan of getting her on board my yacht, and leaving the rest to time and to me?' asked Cadbury, in a voice that intensity rendered husky.

'Yes,' replied Sir Ranald, in a faint voice, while eyeing the fatal documents as if they had serpent-like fascination for him.

'Your hand upon it.'

Sir Ranald put his cold, thin hand in the peer's rough and pudgy one, and in another moment the documents were vanishing in the fire.

Sir Ranald seemed as one in a dream; he could scarcely believe his senses, and that he was thus freed from those encumbrances, the sudden destruction of which had not been a part of Cadbury's plan on the day he visited Slagg, but was an after-

thought to produce a species of dramatic situation, and win, perhaps, through fear or gratitude, what Alison would never accord him from love.

He had now, he thought—for he well knew his man—secured the livelong gratitude and trust of her father; and through her filial love of the latter, and the peril which she would still be led to suppose was menacing him, he would attain the means of getting her away and controlling her movements.

It is an old aphorism which says with truth that a man is usually more inclined to feel kindly towards one on whom he has conferred favours than to one from whom he has received them; thus, barely had Sir Ranald seen the last of his blue paper shrivel up in the flames, and thus felt a load lifted off his mind, when his natural sense of gratitude jarred with his equally natural constitutional pride, which revolted

at the idea of being favoured or protected by any man.

However, they mutually resolved, after Sir Ranald had poured forth his expressions of gratitude, with promises to refund whenever it was in his power to do so, that Alison should be kept in ignorance of what had been done with the bills till they had her on board the yacht, when they both hoped to count upon *her* gratitude; and now, when the pressure of the present danger had passed away, Sir Ranald felt more than ever annoyance, even rage, at his daughter's folly and obstinacy—folly in permitting herself to be swayed by a regard for Goring, and obstinacy in declining the proposal of Cadbury.

'And now that is arranged,' said the latter, 'I'll telegraph to Tom Llanyard to get the *Firefly* into Southampton Water. We can take the train at Basingstoke and be off to-morrow, bag and baggage. Pen-

sion off or pay off that old Scotch fellow, Auchindoir—he is not worth his salt, and would only be in the way on board the *Firefly*; ditto with old Prune your house-keeper. We'll take Daisy with us, however, as Alison must have a maid; and, until we are at sea, watch well that she has no means of posting letters.'

Now that the keen and aching sense of immediate danger had passed away, or been replaced by gratitude and thankfulness, Sir Ranald's spirit, in addition to his annoyance with Alison, writhed under the part he found himself compelled to act, in silently permitting Lord Cadbury to direct his daughter's movements and to arrange their household matters.

But now the packing and preparations for departure began that very night, and were resumed with fresh energy on the following day, Alison toiling with a will in the selection of her father's wardrobe and her own. Alas! there was but little in either to make

the selection difficult, sorrow for the sudden separation from Goring on one hand being tempered on the other by a belief that immediate departure alone could save Sir Ranald from the peril that menaced him but yesterday; and so closely was she watched, and so much were her movements hampered, that she was totally without an opportunity for writing or dispatching even the smallest note to Aldershot.

‘And sae you’re gaun awa’, and without me?’ said Archie, rather reproachfully, to Sir Ranald.

‘Yes; from here, certainly.’

‘Where to?’

‘God knows where to,’ was the absent response.

‘Back to Essilmont, maybe?’

‘In time, perhaps, Archie; in time, but not now,’ said Sir Ranald, with a bitter sigh.

‘Tak’ tent, Sir Ranald; for gudesake gang hooly. Dinna wade if ye canna see

the bottom,' resumed Archie, in a low and confidential voice; 'and beware ye o' that Lord Cadbury. I ken a spune frae a stot's horn as weel as maist men, and I distrust him sairly.'

'That I do not. He has just been a good friend to me, Archie; and now a word in your ear—when I want advice from you concerning my friends or my affairs, I shall condescend to ask it.'

The old servitor looked abashed and crushed. He bowed very low, and withdrew in silence.

At last the hour of departure came, and Lord Cadbury's carriage and a light luggage-van were at the door; and, ere Alison was assisted into the former, she shook old Archie's hand, and then with a sudden impulse kissed his cheek, for she had known Archie from her infancy. Thus he seemed to her as a part and parcel of Essilmont; and, when the carriage rolled away with her in it, the old man lifted up his hands and

voice and wept as only the aged and the hopeless weep.

‘Poor girl!’ thought Cadbury, with a grimace, when after a time there came a distant view of Aldershot, with its camp of huts, its church spire, and Twesildown Hill, ‘she’ll hold, I suppose, for a time, to her little rag of fidelity—her promise to that fellow Goring in the infantry lines; but, *faute de mieux*, we shall cure her of that. We shall see what we shall see, when an hour on board the *Firefly*.’

Well did Alison know where Aldershot lay, but, conscious that her tormentor’s keen eyes were upon her, she turned hers away and gazed steadily in the opposite direction.

‘I thought I had bidden good-bye to the world, Cadbury,’ said Sir Ranald, with the nearest approach to a smile. Alison had seen on his thin, worn face for some time past; ‘and here I am about to see it again in your yacht. Alison will require some additions to her wardrobe, I fear, but we

have no time for that; and though she has Daisy for her attendant, I should like her also to have the society of some lady friend—do you know of one?’

Cadbury looked perplexed.

‘What need of a lady friend or chaperon when you, her own father, are with her? Besides, we are close run for time, and Llanyard awaits us at Southampton,’ he replied, almost with irritation.

‘I have been engaged in many little affairs,’ he grumbled in thought, as he recalled the burned bills and the enormous cost, ‘but never in a “love chase” so expensive as this! I am in for it now, however, and may as well go through with it; and what will the clubs say when they hear that I am off to see the Continent with old Cheyne’s pretty daughter?’

The veteran lover chuckled in his vanity at this, and, ideas of marriage apart, he actually began to scheme how he might ‘drop’ Sir Ranald somewhere on the Con-

minent, compromise the girl in some way, and thus revenge himself on her and Goring too.

He had scarcely made up his mind yet in what direction to sail at that inclement season, but, wherever it was, *another* route would be announced in the papers, to throw adventurous lovers off the scent.

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE MYSTERY.

BEVIL GORING was greatly perplexed and bewildered by the sudden disappearance of the household at Chilcote, and in quest of information rode over to Mrs. Trelawney at the Grange, and she expressed herself as much surprised as himself at their abrupt departure, but she knew only a little more on the subject than he did.

The baronet and his daughter had left England in Lord Cadbury's yacht the *Fire-fly* several days ago.

'Gone! sailed thus suddenly without a letter of explanation, of farewell, or the time of her return being even hinted to me,' were Goring's natural thoughts.

‘And what about Lord Cadbury?’ he asked.

‘Oh! he has gone too; the Court is shut up,’ replied Mrs. Trelawney, with a faint approach to a smile.

‘Gone too!’ replied Goring, more mystified than ever.

Was she yielding to the pressure put upon her by Sir Ranald—yielding after all?

‘And for where has the party sailed?’ he asked.

‘There is no party, on board, I understand, but only Lord Cadbury, Alison, and her father; and whither they have gone no one knows—they decamped so hurriedly. But *you*, at least, will certainly hear in time,’ said Mrs. Trelawney, with a soft smile, as she knew well how deep was the interest Goring and Miss Cheyne had in each other.

‘I am indeed surprised that—that Alison did not write about the whole affair to me.’

‘Perhaps she did not know in time, or

her letter may not have been—may have from some cause miscarried. So whether they are seeking the fiords of Norway or the source of the Nile we cannot know.'

'And who was your informant so far, Mrs. Trelawney?'

'Old Mrs. Rebecca Prune, who came with a farewell message from Alison to me—a circumstance which I thought strange, as courtesy required that she should have called, or at least written.'

'And there was none for me?'

'None. I assure you, Captain Goring, I miss Alison very much, and so does my child here, little Netty.'

'Ah—little Netty, whose "flower-like beauty," as he calls it, Dalton is never weary praising.'

Mrs. Trelawney's colour heightened for a moment, her long lashes flickered, but she merely said,

'How is Captain Dalton? I have not seen him for some time.'

‘Very well—but low-spirited apparently,’ replied Goring, who thought that ‘she seemed interested in poor Tony after all.’

After a pause—

‘Dalton is my dearest friend, Mrs. Trelawney, and, as the confidant of his secrets, he has not concealed from me his deep admiration and love of yourself.’

Mrs. Trelawney’s bright hazel eyes sparkled, and her bosom heaved, while an undoubtedly joyous expression spread over all her animated face.

‘You will pardon me for saying this, when I know that you are the friend of Alison Cheyne, whom I love with my whole life, and shall follow over the world if I can trace her!’ said Goring, whose voice trembled with emotion that sprang from love and anger.

‘I do love sweet Alison very dearly.’

‘And poor Dalton,’ said Goring, anxious to plead his friend’s cause; ‘can you not love him as he deserves to be?’

‘I have not said so,’ replied Mrs. Trelawney, now laughing excessively, and added, ‘what an odd question for a gentleman visitor!’

‘Do pardon me; but will you give him time to hope—through me?’

‘Please not to suggest this, Captain Goring.’

‘Why?’

‘There is—I know—a secret in his life—he knows it too—a secret that in some measure fetters alike his words and his actions.’

‘Good heavens! and this secret?’

‘Is mine also—I have the key to it.’

‘Yours!’

‘Yes—you look perplexed—even distressed; nevertheless it is so,’ she rejoined, tapping the floor, as if impatient, with a slim and pretty foot.

‘Will it ever be unravelled?’

‘Yes—very soon now, perhaps.’

‘But when?’

‘When the proper time comes. Till

then, Captain Goring, I shall trust to your friendship for myself and Captain Dalton not to attempt to probe it, or act the umpire or match-maker between us.'

She said this emphatically, and with one of her sweetest smiles, while her soft white hand was placed confidently in that of Goring.

'I shall be silent as the grave,' said he. 'I have suspected something of this kind. At times a great gloom comes over poor Tony; there has been some mystery about his early life; what, I cannot divine; but it drove him into the ranks, and made him for years loathe England and English society, which he avoided as much as possible. He seems to have got over that whim now, and to you I look forward as the means of effecting a perfect cure.'

She gave Goring one of her soft and inexplicable smiles, and then, drooping her eyelids said, with a sigh, but apparently one of pleasure,

‘ You expect too much from me, Captain Goring.’

Mrs. Trelawney promised him, the moment she could obtain, through any source, some tidings of Alison’s whereabouts, to let him know, and he bade her adieu with his mind full of doubt and anxiety—not doubt of Alison’s faith, but of their mutual future; and anxiety for the annoyances to which she might be subjected, and the pressure that might in many ways be put upon her.

That Cadbury was in her society was an irritating circumstance; but a peer of the realm was some one of consequence, and his movements would ere long most probably be a clue to hers.

Mrs. Trelawney’s mysterious hints about her knowledge of Dalton’s past life gave Goring some food for reflection, and he knew not what to think of them.

‘ So—she seems to have refused Tony, as she did Jerry Wilmot; by Jove, she must be difficult to please!’ thought he, as he

turned his horse in the direction of Aldershot, often giving a long, earnest, and hopeless farewell glance at the old trysting-place beside the beeches.

But Jerry by this time had quite got over his fancy for Mrs. Trelawney, and found a new divinity in the person of her friend, Miss Bella Chevenix, whom he had known from her girlhood, but who now became invested with new and sudden interest to him.

Days passed slowly in succession now, but to Goring there came no tidings of the absent one. Thus life in the winter camp at Aldershot became an intolerable bore to him, and he longed for action of any kind; but now rumours went abroad that troubles were in store at the Cape, and the regiment would be one of the first dispatched to Africa.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WILMOTHURST.

HIS changed mood of mind did not escape the attention of his friend Jerry Wilmot, who said to him one day,

‘My people at Wilmothurst are getting up a spread, or a dinner, or both, in honour of my august appearance in this world some five-and-twenty years ago. Get leave with me from the Colonel, and we’ll start by train from Farnborough. Tell your man to throw your things together; O’Farrel is packing mine, and I am just going to the orderly-room about it.’

Goring agreed to this. The colonel readily granted a few weeks’ leave to both, as the spring drills were a long way off, or

the alternate mud and dust of the Long Valley were not sufficiently deep for military manœuvres; and they started for Wilmothurst, which was situated in one of the prettiest and most wooded parts of Hampshire, Goring being glad of anything that drew him from his own thoughts and aided him to kill the harassing time.

Jerry's man secured their seats and saw their luggage duly placed in the van.

'Now, O'Farrel,' said he, as the latter saluted and retired, 'don't get drunk at the "Tumble-down-Dick," or you'll never be the Sultan of Turkey.'

Farnborough Station was soon left far behind; Fleet, with its pond and moorlands; Winchfield, Basingstoke, with its market and town-hall. The carriage from Wilmothurst met them at a station some miles eastward of Salisbury, and the short winter evening saw them deposited at the *porte-cochère* of the stately modern mansion, which occupied the site of an ancient one,

and of which Jerry was the lord and owner.

‘A fine place this, Jerry,’ exclaimed Goring as they alighted; ‘the grounds are beautiful.’

‘Yes, but the devil of it is that the lands are mortgaged, I believe, to an awful extent; my father was a man of expensive habits and tastes. The old lady *ma mère* hopes, nay, never doubts, that I shall, with my handsome figure and rare accomplishments, pick up an heiress, as if such prizes were to be found like pips on every hedge; but I have my own fancy to consult in the matter of marriage.’

And Jerry laughed softly as he looked at his watch and added,

‘Now to dress for dinner, and then I shall introduce you to the ladies in the drawing-room.’

Jerry had, during the last few weeks, especially since his fancy for Mrs. Trelawney had been cooled by her laughing repulse of

his suit, gone much after Bella Chevenix, a former flame, wherever he had met her—a young lady of whom we shall have much to tell anon—but, as yet, he had given no token of his actual feelings towards her, save a rather marked attention, which she—knowing the views, the necessities, and, more than all, the general bearing of Lady Julia Wilmot towards herself—had never in any way encouraged.

Goring followed up the stately, richly-carpeted, and warmly-lighted staircase the valet, who conducted him to his room, where he found his clothes already unpacked, his evening costume placed on a clothes-rail before a blazing fire, and, as he turned to the great mirror and magnificent toilette table, he thought, with a repining sigh, if something like these luxurious surroundings of which Jerry made so light were his, how different might be the fate or fortune of his engagement with Alison Cheyne.

With soldier-like rapidity he and Jerry

made the necessary changes in their costume; the latter tapped at his door, and together they descended to the spacious drawing-room, before the blazing fire in which, at the end of a long vista, apparently of pictures, pilasters, and window-draperies, two ladies were seated.

Lady Julia Wilmot (she was an Earl's daughter) received them with a stately grace peculiar to herself, but she was too well-bred to display the least warmth of manner; and Jerry kissed her cheek, then her firm, white hand, and, after introducing 'Goring of Ours,' saluted his pretty cousin.

Lady Julia was a fine-looking woman past her fortieth year, but still very handsome, her complexion brilliantly pure, her face and forehead without a line, for thought and care had been alike unknown to her since she left her cradle. Her delicately pencilled black eyebrows and general outline of features were decidedly what are deemed aristocratic, and she gave her hand to

Goring, while receiving somewhat frigidly Jerry's kiss upon her white cheek.

She was not emotional evidently, and deemed that any exhibition of pleasure on seeing her only son after an absence of a few months would be 'bad form.'

Emily Wilmot was decidedly a pretty girl, with blond hair, light blue eyes, a rather *retroussé* nose, a cherub-like mouth and dazzling skin.

'My cousin Emily,' said Jerry, 'Goring of Ours. I hope you will be great friends, but be careful, Emmy. Bevil is our regimental lady-killer—has passed the Guards' School of Instruction in the science of flirtation.'

'Absurd as ever, Jerry,' said his pretty cousin, tapping his hand with her feather fan, but beginning a conversation at once with Goring.

Aware that Jerry would arrive that day about dinner time, Cousin Emily had made her toilette with unusual care. She wore a

rich black silk trimmed with amber satin ; ruffles of rich old lace fell around her tapered arms that were white as a lily, and made the delicate lace seem quite yellow. Bracelets of topazes clasped her slender wrists. The colours chosen became the blond character of her beauty—for she was more than pretty—and yet the whole costume, though rather extreme, was not too much for a family dinner.

During the progress of the latter, which was protracted by an infinity of *entrées* and courses, yet was perfect in all its details, the quartette, on whom the butler and two tall valets were in attendance, found plenty to talk of. The expected departure of the regiment and other troops to the scene of a coming war in Africa ; the last run with the Royal Buckhounds ; the county news ; the coming ball ; who were invited and who were *not*, as ineligible ; and some of the conversation on this mooted point reminded Bevil Goring of the proclivities of Sir Ranald

Cheyne, as also did the amount of heraldry displayed on plate, the china, and everything, from the great silver epergne to the fruit knives, but it was precisely the same with my Lord Cadbury, the man of yesterday.

Here, however, it was, 'the genuine article;' on a *fesse* three eagles' heads and as many escalop shells, gules, crested with the eagle's head of Wilmot, given to the first of the name, Wyliamot, who, according to Dugdale, was settled antecedent to the Conquest in Nottinghamshire, though, unfortunately for Dugdale's veracity, the science of heraldy was unknown in England till long after that event.

'Mr. Chevenix wishes to see you on some important business to-morrow, Jerry,' said Lady Wilmot, when the dessert was over and the servants had withdrawn.

'All right, mater; I'll ride over to-morrow probably—nay, certainly. Try the burgundy, Goring; there are Romanée, Conti, and Chablis before you.'

‘The latter—thanks, Jerry.’

‘Miss Chevenix is at home just now,’ observed Lady Wilmot, with a furtive glance at her son.

‘I know; she returned, or was to return, yesterday.’

‘You seem well aware of her movements; but of what interest are they to you, Jerry?’

‘Every pretty girl’s movements are of interest to me,’ replied Jerry, laughing.

There was a mischievous pout on Cousin Emily’s pouting lips, that were like two rose-buds; but his mother’s curled slightly with disdain.

‘She is handsome, certainly,’ said Jerry, emphatically; ‘I appeal to Goring that she is.’

‘And rather good style, considering her origin,’ added Lady Wilmot.

‘Well, it is better surely to be all that than plain.’

‘*Cela dépend,*’ laughed Cousin Emily; ‘it makes no difference to me.’

But Jerry knew that it *did* make a difference ; however, he said—

‘ You, Emily, may well afford to hear any woman praised.’

‘ But what can Mr. Chevenix want with you, Jerry?’ asked Lady Julia.

‘ Can’t say, mater dear—business or some such bother, of course.’

‘ People of his class should wait till they are sent for.’

‘ His class?’

‘ Well ; he is only a village attorney.’

‘ A very fine old man, who has had many business transactions with the governor before my time.’

‘ Slang again, Jerry ! Does he pick up all that kind of thing in barracks, Captain Goring?’

‘ Very probably ; it is the style of the day,’ replied Goring, laughing.

‘ It is a very bad style, Jerry dear,’ said Emily, gently.

‘ Yes, I repeat,’ said the hostess, haughtily,

‘that persons like Chevenix should not send for their superiors, but wait till they are sent for.’

‘Like Chevenix ; how you run on, mother. One would think that the old days of sitting below the salt had come again!’ exclaimed Jerry, with a somewhat ruffled air. ‘As the world goes now, how long do you think this vast distinction of class and class will last? Why, nobility itself will one day pass away—nay, respect for it is nearly a thing of the past already.’

‘Nobility pass away!’ exclaimed Lâdy Julia, the descendant of twenty earls and more, her pale face growing paler at such unheard-of opinion. ‘Where *have* you picked up such horrid Radical and Communistic ideas, Jerry? Not in the army surely!’

‘I pick them up from the public prints, yet don’t endorse them. But to me it seems that all will go in time, and quietly now, as no one will care to make a row

about it. Don't you see the terrible tendency of the times? I call them terrible from your point of view, mother. Even the dignity of the Crown is slighted in almost every debate in the Lower House now by some fellow or other; and to me all this seems to foreshadow the coming time when the Crown itself may fall into the dust without defenders, for there will be no Cavaliers in England to send their plate to the melting pot and mount their serving men, and no loyal clans in the North to descend again under a Montrose or Dundee.'

'And all this is to come to pass because I don't approve of old Mr. Chevenix,' said Lady Julia, rather scornfully, as she fanned herself; and, then bowing to Goring, she nodded to Miss Wilmot, and both rising sailed away to the drawing-room.

Goring read a peculiar expression in the fine face of the elder lady as she withdrew, and it gave him a clue to some of Jerry's movements lately; but he made no reference

to it, nor would it have been courteous to do so, familiar as he and Jerry were.

Jerry twirled his moustaches with a momentary air of annoyance. It was evident that there existed some secret bone of contention between mother and son—a skeleton in the cupboard at Wilmothurst; but who could have supposed that this ghastly personage was in reality the brilliant and blooming Bella Chevenix!

And when, after having a few glasses of wine together, and a cigar in the smoking-room, they rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, the obnoxious subject was again resumed by Jerry and his mother, somewhat apart from Bevil Goring, who drew a seat near the piano, over the keys of which Miss Wilmot was gracefully idling, or affecting an *andante* of Beethoven.

‘The invitations for the ball in your honour, my dear boy, are all issued,’ said Lady Julia; ‘and every one has accepted—only think of that! Every one, and here is the list.’

He scanned it, and saw many familiar names that stood high in the county, and said, with a twirl of his moustache,

‘I don’t see the name of Chevenix here.’

‘Chevenix again!’ said his mother, with a cloudy eye and curling lip; ‘the lawyer man?’

‘Who else, mother dear? Now, don’t be absurd. There is no other Chevenix in all Hampshire. They must be asked—he and his daughter.’

‘The girl is said to look well in a drawing-room.’

‘She looks lovely!’ exclaimed Jerry, incautiously.

‘She was a mere hobbledehoy when you and she used to play at battledore and croquet together.’

‘She is, I repeat, a very lovely woman now, mother,’ continued Jerry, with enthusiasm.

‘You have seen her lately?’ asked the elderly lady, in a casual tone.

‘Yes ; often at a hop in Willis’s Rooms, at the camp balls, with the buckhounds, and at Mrs. Trelawney’s.’

‘Who *is* Mrs. Trelawney?’ asked Lady Julia, languidly, while elevating her delicately pencilled eyebrows.

‘A widow who lives near Aldershot, at a place called Chilcote Grange.’

‘Ah!’

Jerry laughed softly, as he thought how familiar his lady-mother might have been with the fair widow’s name had she not rejected his attention, and laughed him off cavalierly as he thought at the time.

‘There is every reason in the world why we must have Miss Chevenix, mother,’ persisted Jerry, colouring with vexation as he returned to the charge; ‘she is highly accomplished, and sings well.’

‘Taught well, no doubt—people of that kind send their children to the best schools now.’

‘I should like you to hear her voice.’

‘Thanks—not here, at all events,’ said Lady Julia, shrugging her shoulders, ‘the girl must be forward enough—rides with the buckhounds, you say?’

‘Every one does.’

‘The reason, perhaps, she goes there.’

‘I can assure you, mother, that Bel—Miss Chevenix—is a very proud girl.’

‘Likely enough—many vulgarians are ; but, if she is so proud as you say, we must teach her what her real position is—the daughter of a village attorney—of our local agent—the granddaughter of a farmer.’

‘One of the oldest families on the estate.’

‘Enough—she will make the hundred and fourth person invited.’

‘If she accepts,’ said Jerry.

‘*If* she accepts!’ repeated his mother, with elevated brows, as she added the girl’s name to her list, and tossed the golden pen from her white jewelled fingers.

‘At the last meet at Salthill, she came

with Miss Cheyne of Essilmont,' said Jerry.

'I have heard of that girl—the daughter of a broken-down Scottish baronet. But all kinds of horrid people go, with the highest in rank, to these rough gatherings.'

'Glad Goring did not hear you,' said Jerry, glancing nervously towards the pair at the piano.

'Why?'

'He is rather spooney in that quarter.'

'Don't use camp slang, Jerry—which quarter—the Chevenix girl?'

'No, Miss Cheyne,' replied her son, in a low voice.

'Emily,' said Lady Julia, 'I have added that girl's name to our list—you will see that an invitation is sent to her and her father to-morrow.'

'Yes, aunt,' replied Emily, with a slight shade of annoyance on her naturally sweet face. 'Was it not she who behaved so shockingly to Colonel Graves, of the Artillery?'

‘It was Graves—the utter cad—who behaved shockingly to her, poor girl,’ exclaimed Jerry, with warmth.

‘Really, Jerry, you must keep your temper. See how you have made Emily blush.’

‘Mother!’

‘You are quite pugnacious in defence of this young woman; but please now let us drop the subject.’

‘My dear mother,’ said Jerry, good-humouredly, and kissing her cheek, as he had now gained his point, ‘the male public generally, and particularly that portion of it who wear the red rag, are rather subject to the blandishments of the fair sex, and are not all able to resist them, like St. Anthony the Abbot in his wood at Coma.’

‘You make a jest of everything, Jerry,’ said Lady Julia; ‘but,’ she added, under cover of Emily’s musical performance, ‘it has been said that no one knows how people pick up “a knowledge of others’ antecedents from their own careless talk;” thus,

my dear boy, I am glad you did not become entangled by that dreadful Trelawney woman.'

Jerry, the rogue, thought so now himself, but he coloured deeply at this abrupt remark, as it showed him that his mother knew much more of his movements than he in the least suspected.

His pretty cousin Emily, the orphan daughter of his father's younger brother, evidently had a *penchant* for him; her jealousy of any rival was easily excited; and thus she shared to the full all his mother's overstrained prejudices against Bella Chevenix, and, finding that he was still somewhat indifferent to her charms, she might doubtless have had no objection to get up a little affair with Bevil Goring. But the latter was too preoccupied to relish her vivacity or respond to it, and, though companionable enough, she found him full of his own thoughts, and at times indifferent to a provoking degree.

When the ladies retired for the night, and Jerry joined Goring in the smoking-room to have a last whiff, with some seltzer and brandy, he found the latter deep in studying the geography of the Mediterranean, a map of which he had pulled out from a stand of maps on rollers.

‘What is up, old fellow?’ said Jerry; ‘going in for cramming again? Thought you were surely done with that beastly work.’

‘Thank heaven, yes; but look here!’

Goring had first seen the papers that had come by the evening post, and been cut and laid out by the butler. He had, as usual, turned to the shipping and fashionable intelligence, and to all the paragraphed news, in search of tidings of the lost one, and had alighted at last on an announcement in the *Times* that Lord Cadbury’s yacht, the *Fire-fly*, ‘with Sir Ranald Cheyne and a small but select party on board,’ had sailed for the Mediterranean.

Now this was not the case, as the notice had been inserted by Slagg, in obedience to the peer, as a blind to Goring in particular, while the 'small and select party' consisted only of poor Alison herself.

'The Mediterranean,' said Jerry, as he lit a Havanna; 'that is a wide word—you can't make much of that in the hope of overhauling the yacht.'

Bevil acquiesced in the fact, and that it would be almost impossible as yet to trace its route or whereabouts. He had but one comfort, though somewhat a negative one, that her father was with her; yet he knew not the real character of Lord Cadbury, nor the plans he was capable of contriving, encouraged by his own great wealth on the one hand, and the poverty and age of Sir Ranald on the other, with the girl's utter helplessness if she were, by any means, deprived of the latter's protection, now that the stings of jealousy and revenge against himself, Goring, were added to Alison's re-

jection of his hand, with all the brilliant settlements attached to it.

Then there would come into Bevil's heart fears that without his love to support her, and his occasional presence to sway her gentle spirit, it might be gradually bent, if not broken, under the united influence of Cadbury with his wealth, and her father with his pride and poverty; and he drew many a harrowing picture of promises being perhaps wrung from her, by which she might eventually be lost to him for ever.

As it seemed now, she had been spirited away, taken out of his life suddenly—had passed, as it were, out of the scheme of his existence.

They had been parted roughly, without their hearts resting on the joy of that future which lovers alone look forward to.

Day and night he thought of her, his lost Alison. Gathering—hoarding, as it were, in his inner heart, 'as a miser hoards his gold—memories of passion-laden eyes seeking

his, and then often long looks of fondness turned aside ' lest others saw their glories, and of stolen kisses, stolen from lips that quivered and trembled for their own temerity and ardour.

He could but think again, alas for the time that has been !

' But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.'

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. CHEVENIX'S BUSINESS.

WITH all his erratic habits and general thoughtlessness, Jerry Wilmot was not without a capacity for business; thus on the evening after his return home he rode over to the village of Wilmothurst to visit Mr. Chevenix ostensibly as to matters connected with the estate, and with the decided desire, no doubt, of seeing the brilliant Bella.

The village consisted of a few houses, an ancient church of Norman times, with a squat square tower, covered with ivy, a spacious green, overlooked by an old thatched inn with a swinging signboard; and

opposite stood the comfortable, two-storeyed mansion of Mr. Chevenix, who acted as legal adviser in small matters, as factor, and land agent for the Wilmots and other county families.

A kindly-mannered and benign-looking old man, he received Jerry in his cosy dining-room with considerable warmth, and the handsome Bella fairly blushed with pleasure on seeing her acknowledged admirer; and Jerry, when he saw the rare beauty of the girl, thought how thankful he should be that the widow had *not* accepted him!

At Wilmothurst Bella enjoyed the reputation of being the best organiser of pleasant picnics in the sunny summer-time, the great designer of games and charades at Christmastide, the most tasteful decorator of the village church for festivals, a kind friend to the poor and all the little ones of the hamlet.

Yet none shone brighter or better at the

balls in Brighton or elsewhere out of her narrow home circle; she was a dashing horsewoman in the field; but seemed always most in her element when seated over some piece of feminine work by her old father's side, as Jerry now found her, in the flower-scented and lamp-lit little dining-room surrounded by all the home influences her presence caused.

Jerry knew now precisely how Bella was viewed by his mother and cousin, and this repressed—if not his ardour—the scope of his attentions.

The haughty Bella also knew from a thousand petty instances how Lady Julia Wilmot viewed her position in society, and resented it accordingly, for she was one of the many in and about Wilmothurst who had felt the sting of that lady's 'snub,' and were against her in consequence. Thus her first thought had been to decline the invitation to the ball, which had reached her that forenoon. Then on consideration came

the knowledge that to do so would cause much local speculation, that many might infer she had not been invited at all, and that by her absence she would lose the society of Jerry for a whole night; and the girl's natural desire to outshine—as she knew she would do—so many there, if not all who would be present, led her to write an acceptance.

She had done so, and at once began the serious consideration of her costume—serious only as to the variety to select from, for her father was a rich man—richer than Lady Julia Wilmot had the least idea of.

‘You are coming to our ball, of course, Miss Chevenix?’ said Jerry.

‘The invitation just reached me to-day, and I have not yet posted an acceptance.’

‘But you will come, of course,’ urged Jerry, looking admiringly into her bright laughing eyes.

‘I am not quite certain,’ faltered Bella, and paused.

‘Oh, nonsense, she will be there readily enough,’ said her father; adding—‘I think I may be pardoned for saying it, Mr. Wilmot, but my Bella will be the belle of the ball. However, leave us just now, dear. Mr. Wilmot has come to see me on business, I doubt not, and that won’t be interesting to you.’

She at once took up her work-basket, and withdrew, with a bow and a smile, and Jerry, as his gaze followed her, and he saw what a perfect creature she was, so slim and graceful with the pure complexion that comes of health and country air, soft and sparkling brown eyes and rich hair coiled round a shapely head, thought how unworthy it was of his mother to view the girl as she did, and to treat her as she had hitherto done.

He knew exactly from what her indecision about the ball sprang. Never before had she or her father been invited to the Manor House when other guests were

there, at dinner or garden parties, and when they had dined with her and Miss Wilmot, in solitary state, she always resented bitterly the airs of patronage which Lady Julia adopted.

‘She’s going to the ball, never fear, Mr. Jerry, and there is her reply on the mantel-piece,’ said her father.

‘Permit me to be the bearer of it,’ said Jerry, transferring it at once to his pocket.

‘And, now through the medium of some brandy and water, we shall turn to business matters.’

‘Glad to hear you say so,’ replied Jerry; ‘I have wished much to see you, Chevenix, about money matters.’

Mr. Chevenix smiled faintly, and coughed slightly behind his hand.

‘How has it been that of late so little has been paid into my bank account,’ said Jerry, ‘and that I have had such difficulty in squaring matters at Aldershot; even in meeting my losses on the last Divisional

Steeplechase, and in many other things; that in fact both the mater and myself are often short of the "ready"?'

'The estate, you are aware, was heavily mortgaged by your late worthy father.'

'I have heard that a hundred times, and know it to my cost,' replied Jerry, impatiently.

'And since you joined the army you must also be aware that, to meet the many requirements of yourself and Lady Julia, I have had to effect other mortgages, for instance, on Langley Park (which my forefathers farmed under yours for more than two centuries), on the forty acres of Upton Stoke, and on Hazelwood; that, in short, all these may never be yours again, as I see no way of your removing these encumbrances, save by a wealthy marriage; and that the good lady, your mother, has not the slightest idea of the extent of the evil and all your liabilities.'

'The devil!' exclaimed Jerry, 'these are pleasant things to listen to.'

There was a silence between them for a time, and Jerry took a long sip at his brandy and seltzer. With all his admiration and certainly growing love for the handsome Bella, she seemed to be receding from him in the distance now.

‘I am deeply sorry to tell you these things, Mr. Wilmot,’ said Chevenix, who had genuine respect and love for the listener, and really had the well-being of the old family at heart; ‘it is a serious thing for a young man like you, the inheritor of a good old name, bred with expensive tastes and so forth, to find yourself hampered and trammelled thus at your very outset of life, but so it is.’

‘We live and learn, Mr. Chevenix,’ said Jerry, with unusual bitterness for him.

‘True,’ added his old agent.

‘We live and learn, but not the *wiser* grow, says John Pomfret.’

‘And who the devil is he?’ asked Jerry, testily.

‘A poet and divine of the seventeenth century.’

Jerry sat staring into the fire as if bewildered by the sudden revelation—this new state of things.

‘And who holds all the infernal mortgages?’ asked Jerry, abruptly.

‘I do—they are in the iron safe on yonder shelf.’

‘You; and who advanced all this money to my father, and to myself latterly?’

‘I did—every shilling to the old squire and to you, Mr. Jerry; but do not be alarmed—do *not* be alarmed—I have no intention of foreclosing.’

Jerry was more thunderstruck than ever. Here was another startling revelation. He found that more than half of his paternal estate was in the hands of the very man whose daughter he had been learning to love in secret, and whom his proud mother so heartily disliked and publicly slighted.

He had hinted, as related, of mortgages

on the evening of his arrival with Bevil Goring, but this state of matters he was altogether unprepared for. In short, it would seem as if but a moiety of his property remained to him, and that the heiress of it all was Bella Chevenix!

Bella, the daughter of the village attorney, 'the lawyer man,' as Lady Julia called him, whose forefathers did yeoman service to his, and farmed old Langley Park.

'Take courage—you have yet time to look about you, and money, if it can be procured from some other source, may repair these evils,' said Mr. Chevenix, kindly; but he knew not what was then in Jerry's mind. That in reality a love for Bella had been fast becoming the ruling thought of his life; that on learning she had returned to Wilmothurst he had arranged to return home also, and had made up his mind, despite his mother's pride and opposition, to propose for the girl; but dared he do so now?

Their positions were completely reversed,

and were he to do so she would never believe in his love or view him as other than a pretender, who offered it in barter for the mortgages her father held on his estate.

The latter was eyeing Jerry, and, having no idea of what his secret thoughts were, failed to see why, if even a half of his estate remained, he should seem so suddenly overcome, for he had grown very pale, and he respired like one in pain.

To thrust all love for Bella out of his heart was now the bitter task to which he must set himself, and perhaps to replace her image by one of the many heiresses to whom his mother so often drew his attention; but that could not be. Jolly, good-hearted Jerry would never condescend to be mercenary; he felt that he would rather a thousand times share poverty with a loving little girl like Bella than wealth with another. Matters had not yet come to poverty—far from it; but *now*, and after all that had transpired, and he had learned *who* the

holder of these fatal mortgages was, how could he speak to her or her father of love or marriage without being most cruelly and degradingly misunderstood, and having his object utterly misconstrued?

‘And the interest on the mortgages?’ he asked, in a hard, dry tone.

‘Has been unpaid for several years.’

‘Making matters worse and worse. It was six per cent. on Langley Park, Mr. Chevenix, and that is stiff interest as things go.’

‘Yes, it *was*.’

‘You speak of it in the past tense.’

‘Yes.’

‘Worse and worse,’ assented Mr. Chevenix, shaking his white head. ‘But bear up, my dear boy. I may call you so?’ added the old man, kindly patting Jerry’s shoulder. ‘Money will pull you through. A handsome young fellow like you, with your family prestige, will easily find a rich wife, and an officer has a hundred chances of success when other fellows have none.’

Jerry had not the heart to ask what the total sum of his liabilities amounted to, and rose to depart.

‘Bid Miss Chevenix good-bye for me,’ said he, as he departed in haste, having just then no desire to add to the intense mortification that crushed him by looking again on the bright face of the unconscious Bella—for unconscious she was of what their mutual monetary relations were till her father some time after informed her, when the news came to her perhaps too late.

Sunk in thoughts too bitter for words, Jerry rode slowly home through the dusk of the gloomy winter evening. The barriers raised by evil fortune, and added to by a sense of honour and propriety, enhanced in his eyes the value of the girl he felt that he had lost, and rendered dearer to him the hopes he had been cherishing of late, and which had become so precious to him.

He longed for the society and advice of Goring over a ‘quiet weed’ to talk about

these things ere he confided the state of matters to his mother, who, with all her great love of him, he feared could not be brought to see how matters stood with regard to the estate and the encumbrances thereon.

When he joined her in the drawing-room before dinner, the careworn expression of his face—an expression all unusual to him—certainly struck her, but for a time only.

‘You have been with Mr. Chevenix?’ she asked.

‘Yes, mother.’

‘And he has worried you with business.’

‘Yes; his daughter is coming to the ball. Here is her reply; I brought it with me,’ said he, with an irrepressible sigh.

‘Of course she will come; who ever doubted it?’ responded Lady Julia, as she somewhat contemptuously tossed Bella’s unopened note into the fire; and Jerry turned away to join Goring and his cousin Emily, who were looking over a portfolio of prints upon a stand of gilded wood.

To Jerry at this precise time the familiar yet gorgeous drawing-room, with all its inlaid cabinets and brackets, bearing treasures of art and *bric-a-brac*, as seen under the soft light of wax candles in sconces and the glittering crystal chandelier, gave a sense of worry by its apparent incongruity, as did the very attire of his mother and cousin by the richness of its materials, the laces, the jewelry; and he absolutely shivered when he thought of the coming birthday ball, with its hundred and four guests on one hand, and the mortgages of Chevenix with their unpaid interest on the other.

To Jerry it seemed that ere long his mother might have to betake herself to Bruges or Boulogne to retrench, while he might have to exchange for India if the route came not speedily for Africa.

Bevil Goring, when they were alone, heard with genuine concern the state of affairs as Jerry set them before him, and agreed with him that to continue his

attentions to Miss Chevenix would lead to an entire misconception on the part of herself and her father as to the true state of his heart, and lead them to infer that he was only a fortune-hunter ; and honest Jerry blushed scarlet at the name, and twirled and gnawed his moustache with intense irritation.

Though she failed to take in the whole situation—which Jerry knew would be the case—Lady Julia heard his tidings with considerable alarm, and felt her wrath increased against Mr. Chevenix, which was utterly unreasonable.

‘The state of our—or rather your—affairs, as this man has set them before you, Jerry,’ said Lady Julia, ‘now renders it absolutely necessary that you should marry for money, and that at once.’

‘Or cut the service and emigrate,’ groaned Jerry.

‘Emigrate !’

‘Invest in a pickaxe and spade, and try Ballarat or the Diamond Fields.’

'How can you jest thus?' said his mother, loftily.

'To me the nearest heiress seems to be Bella Chevenix,' said Jerry, not unwilling to revenge her for the slighting remarks his mother daily made.

'She has a fortune certainly—a fortune won by advances made upon our lands—but of what use can it be to her, brought up, as she has been, ignorant of the habits, the tastes, and requirements of our class?'

'She is ignorant of none, and enjoys them all,' replied Jerry, with some asperity.

'You inherited the estate encumbered, and have, in no small degree, added to its burdens, and, if you do not make a rich marriage, may be—my poor, dear Jerry—a ruined man.'

'We are going to fight King Koffee, they say. I'll get taken prisoner, and marry his youngest daughter!' cried Jerry, with a gleam of his old recklessness.

For some days now he did not go near

Bella Chevenix, who began to feel a little wroth at him in consequence, as she had no key as yet to what influenced Jerry.

‘Their ball!’ exclaimed the proud girl, petulantly; ‘I am not sure that I should go, papa, to be patronised and slighted perhaps.’

‘Patronised or slighted—who dare do either to you?’ asked her father, with surprise.

‘I shall be bored to death, I fear.’

But the desire to appear where she knew she would shine prevailed over all her doubts, and she devoted all her energies to have a costume that should be second to none.

Meanwhile Jerry found the impossibility of abstaining entirely from visiting the house of Mr. Chevenix, and so days of meetings in various ways passed—meetings in which their lives seemed to be mutually merged in that sweet occupation which was not quite love-making, but yet was far, far in advance

of that perilous frivolity that so often leads to it called—flirtation.

Yet Jerry was further now from disclosing himself than ever, and Bella seemed in no hurry for him to do so, for she was young enough—even after all she had seen of society—to shrink from a declaration, for to a girl there is something so seductive, so sweet in hovering on the brink, when she, as Bella did in her secret heart, loves the man.

Cousin Emily was not slow in discovering the direction in which Jerry so often turned his horse's head, and hinted thereof to Lady Julia.

‘But for the dangers my poor boy will have to encounter,’ said the latter, ‘I would hail with pleasure his departure to the coast of Africa, as a useful means of separating him from this most artful creature.’

Meanwhile an influx of visitors and guests precluded the ball, as many came

from a considerable distance. Like Goring, Jerry was in no mood for all this gaiety just then, and the latter resented that his duties as host enforced his presence at Wilmot-hurst, and consequent absence from Bella Chevenix.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIREFLY.

THE red sun of a clear winter day was shining on the two chalky eminences at the embouchure of the Arques, or Bethune, and on the low tongue of land between them, whereon is situated the seaport of Dieppe in Normandy, from the church of which the coast of England can be distinctly seen, when the *Firefly*, which really was a beautiful yacht, crept slowly along on a wind under the lee of the shore, from which she was rather more than a mile distant.

She was a taut-rigged craft of about two hundred tons, and whether one regarded the crew, the fitting of the rigging, or the

cut of the sails, it was evident that in skilful hands she could do anything. For a Cowes yacht she was curiously rigged, being a hermaphrodite—brig forward and schooner aft. Her foremast, like her bowsprit, was strong and heavy, her mainmast long and tapering. Her upper spars were slender and light, with topmast, topgallant mast, and royal mast, all like slender wands, yet capable of carrying a great amount of canvas. Her flush deck was white as the driven snow, and she had eight six pounders, all brass, and polished like gold—bright as the copper with which she was sheathed to the bends.

Such was the craft on board of which Alison Cheyne found herself a species of prisoner, and compelled to take a part in an erratic and apparently a purposeless cruise.

To sail for Madeira had been the first intention of Lord Cadbury, when Slagg, by his direction, inserted in the newspapers a paragraph to the effect that he had gone to

the Mediterranean—a paragraph expressly designed to mislead Bevil Goring; but heavy head-winds had prevailed, and after hanging about in ‘the Chops of the Channel’ for a week and more, the *Firefly* was standing northward along the coast of France.

Tom Llanyard, Cadbury’s captain, a bluff-looking, curly-haired man, about forty years of age, had been for a brief space a warrant officer in the Royal Navy. He was a good-hearted fellow—not very polished, but a thorough seaman. He had a secret contempt for the character of his employer, who did not care much for yachting, but thought it sounded well to have such an appendage as the *Firefly* at Cowes. Tom found the pay good; the lodging ditto; and the duty was easy. Tom was a sailor or nothing; and thus being compelled to work, ‘the yacht service,’ as he used to say, ‘suited him to a hair.’

He certainly thought the season a strange one for a cruise; and as for Mr. Gaskins,

Cadbury's groom and chief valet, he utterly loathed the whole expedition, and, connecting it shrewdly in some way with Miss Cheyne, he hated her with a most unholy hatred.

To Tom Llanyard she was a new experience; she was so totally unlike any other of her sex he had seen on board the *Firefly*; and he had—we are sorry to say—seen many that were rather remarkable.

The weather had been rough, and the poor girl, who had suffered much from sea sickness, of a necessity remained below; while her luckless attendant, Daisy Prune, was utterly prostrated by the same ailment, and the order of things was now reversed, for Alison had to attend upon her. The presence of Daisy, however, was a source of protection to the former, as it saved her from much of the attention of Cadbury, who had hoped that great events might be developed or achieved by the sea voyage.

Alison's freshness was delightful to the

coarse, jaded man of the world, who, tired at last of extravagant and congenial dissipation (that would have horrified his worthy father the Alderman of Threadneedle Street), thought now of trying domestic felicity, *pour se désennuyer*; and truly Alison was so unlike most of the other women he had known, or whose acquaintance he had chosen to cultivate, that the present opportunity gave him great expectations of the future.

He actually reckoned upon a safe conquest, now that he had her all to himself; and so far as Sir Ranald was concerned, while piling kindnesses upon him, and pressing upon him also the best wines that the cellar of Cadbury Court offered, he would not have been sorry had a gale of wind blown the pompous old baronet overboard, and left Alison alone in the world—alone, and at his mercy!

Leaving Sir Ranald busy with a telescope on deck scanning the churches of St.

Jacques and St. Remy, with Le Follet and the fisher town of Dieppe, Cadbury descended to the luxurious and beautiful little cabin of the yacht, the gilded and mahogany fittings of which were exquisite, and there found Alison—alone, as he expected.

How sad and fair, young and pure, she looked in all the brightness of her beauty, as her head rested against the crimson back of the cushioned locker or sofa on which she was seated in an attitude expressive of utter weariness of heart.

‘Alison,’ said he, attempting to take her hand.

Her eyes flashed now, and her proud little lip curled, as she said, ‘Lord Cadbury, when did I give you permission to call me—as papa does—by my Christian name?’

‘Why do you *Lord* me?’ he asked; ‘I would you called me—Timothy,’ he added, rather faintly; and at this absurd name a little smile flickered on Alison’s pale face, and a gesture of impatience escaped her, as

she knew that she was about to be subjected to some more of his odious and weary love-making.

‘My passion for you made me so modest and diffident,’ said he (though in reality it was his years), ‘that I addressed myself first to your father, though you were well aware of the sweet hopes I fostered in my heart, Alison.’

‘It is impossible for me to listen to more of this sort of thing, Lord Cadbury.’

‘I can scarcely believe that your decision is final—that you are in earnest with me.’

‘Earnest! Do you imagine, sir, that I would jest in this matter, and—and with you?’ she exclaimed, becoming—with all her native gentleness—tremulous with suppressed passion.

‘When once I ventured to hint of a deeper interest in you than mere friendship, you did not discourage me,’ urged Cadbury, who by use and wont could make love in his own way pretty fluently now.

‘Perhaps I misunderstood you,—or deemed it—deemed it——’

‘What, Alison?’

‘A fatherly interest.’

Cadbury winced a little at this remark.

‘In anything beyond that,’ continued Alison, ‘you perhaps do me honour, but in any instance I can never love where I do not respect and esteem.’

‘And have I forfeited your esteem?’

‘Yes.’

‘In what way?’

‘By trepanning me on board this yacht—away from home and my friends!’

‘Friends at Aldershot,’ thought Cadbury, as he laughed to himself and said,

‘But why so severe a term as trepanning?’

‘You led me to believe when we quitted Chilcote in such hot haste that instant flight alone in this vessel would save papa from arrest through certain bills which he says he saw you destroy. So you and he—*he*,’ she added, with a heavy sob—‘have both

deceived me, and now I believe neither of you. It was a vile trick on the part of you both to separate me from Captain Goring.'

Cadbury had reckoned at least upon her gratitude for taking up the bills of Slagg, as he had to some extent won that of her father; but even this plan failed to serve him, and so far as Alison was concerned he might as well have thrown his money into the sea. The name of his rival on her lips infuriated him, and he tugged at his long, white horse-shoe moustache viciously, as he thought that he had played what he deemed his trump card, and yet lost after all!

He gave her a glance of a rather mingled nature and retreated to the deck, where his discomposure of face and manner was so apparent to Sir Ranald that, after a few words of explanation, the latter sought the cabin to remonstrate with the unfortunate and weary Alison.

As was before hinted, Sir Ranald's emotions were of a curiously mingled nature.

He felt that he certainly owed a debt of gratitude to Lord Cadbury for relieving him of terrible monetary pressure, and he was anxious, for various reasons, that Alison should accept him. He had no romance in his nature—never had any, and did not believe that disparity of years and tastes—still less a secret or previous fancy—were to be valued or consulted at all!

He felt that he acted wisely to his daughter in leaguings with the wealthy peer against her; yet, over and above all, he loved her dearly and tenderly; and amid all this was an undying hostility to Bevil Goring, whom he deemed the real cause of all this opposition to their wishes, and consequently the present trouble, turmoil, and unnecessary voyaging in rough and wintry weather.

Though it was a relief, without doubt, to be away now beyond the reach or ken of the hook-nosed or vulture-eyed money-lenders, who, like Slagg, had long possessed,

among their oft-times hopelessly-regarded assets, his bills and acceptances.

He saw she looked pale, very pale indeed; but that, of course, he attributed to the *mal de mer*; but as for love, no one, he believed, ever sickened or died of that. A long separation was the surest and best cure.

‘Foolish girl!’ he began at once; ‘still mooning, and actually talking, as Cadbury told me, of that utterly ineligible and most detrimental fellow at Aldershot; I am certain you could forget him if you tried, Alison. In these days of ours, ninety-nine girls out of a hundred would leap with exultation at such offers as those of Lord Cadbury.’

‘Then, I suppose, I must be the hundredth girl, papa,’ said Alison, steadily and gravely; for a consciousness that her father, whom she had deemed the mirror of honour, had leagued with this *parvenu* to deceive her, had caused a change in her manner towards him.

‘And I repeat that in these days of ours,’

he continued, 'it is, or ought to be, the object of both men and women to marry well.'

'That is, to marry for money,' said Alison.

'Yes; if a girl has beauty and birth, but not money, she should look for some one who has that more than necessary element towards our very existence. If she has money with both these attributes, she should look for something more.'

'More, papa?'

'Yes, she should look for that which a poor girl seldom or never has offered her.'

'And what is that?'

'A title.'

'In fact, in any way or every way to sell herself to the highest bidder. Oh, what a selfish code!' exclaimed the girl, with great bitterness of heart. 'Did the Cheynes of Essilmont always do this?'

'They of old were not as we are now.'

'What?'

'Beggars!' replied her father, with equal bitterness of heart, for his was naturally a

proud one ; ‘ but, as Lever says, “ the world makes us many things we never meant to be.” ’

‘ Do you forget, papa, that marriage is a sacrament, and that without a full and perfect consent it is in reality no marriage at all, and should not be binding, even though the blessing were given by the Archbishop of Canterbury.’

‘ What do you mean, Alison?’ asked her father, surprised alike by her tone and this theory.

‘ Simply what I say.’

‘ How dare you, a mere girl, talk thus?’

‘ Take care, papa. If driven desperate, there is no knowing what I may—not say—but do!’

Sir Ranald became silent. He had never seen her in this mood before ; and he, of course, ascribed it to ‘ the fatal influence that fellow Goring had obtained over her mind.’

So this conversation ended ; but the interview with her father and that with Cadbury are but examples of many with

which she was tormented daily *ad nauseam*.

Alison ere long had fresh food for sorrow given to her, when a pilot boat brought off to the *Firefly* some London papers, and in these she was informed—as if by chance—there were rumours of the fast approaching war in Africa, and she saw the glances, most meaning glances, of satisfaction that were exchanged by her father and Lord Cadbury, on its being announced that among the troops detailed for service in the field under Sir Garnet Wolseley was the regiment of Bevil Goring; and so a double and more terrible separation—perhaps a final and fatal one—was before them, and the heart of the poor girl seemed to fill with tears as she read and re-read the startling paragraph.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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